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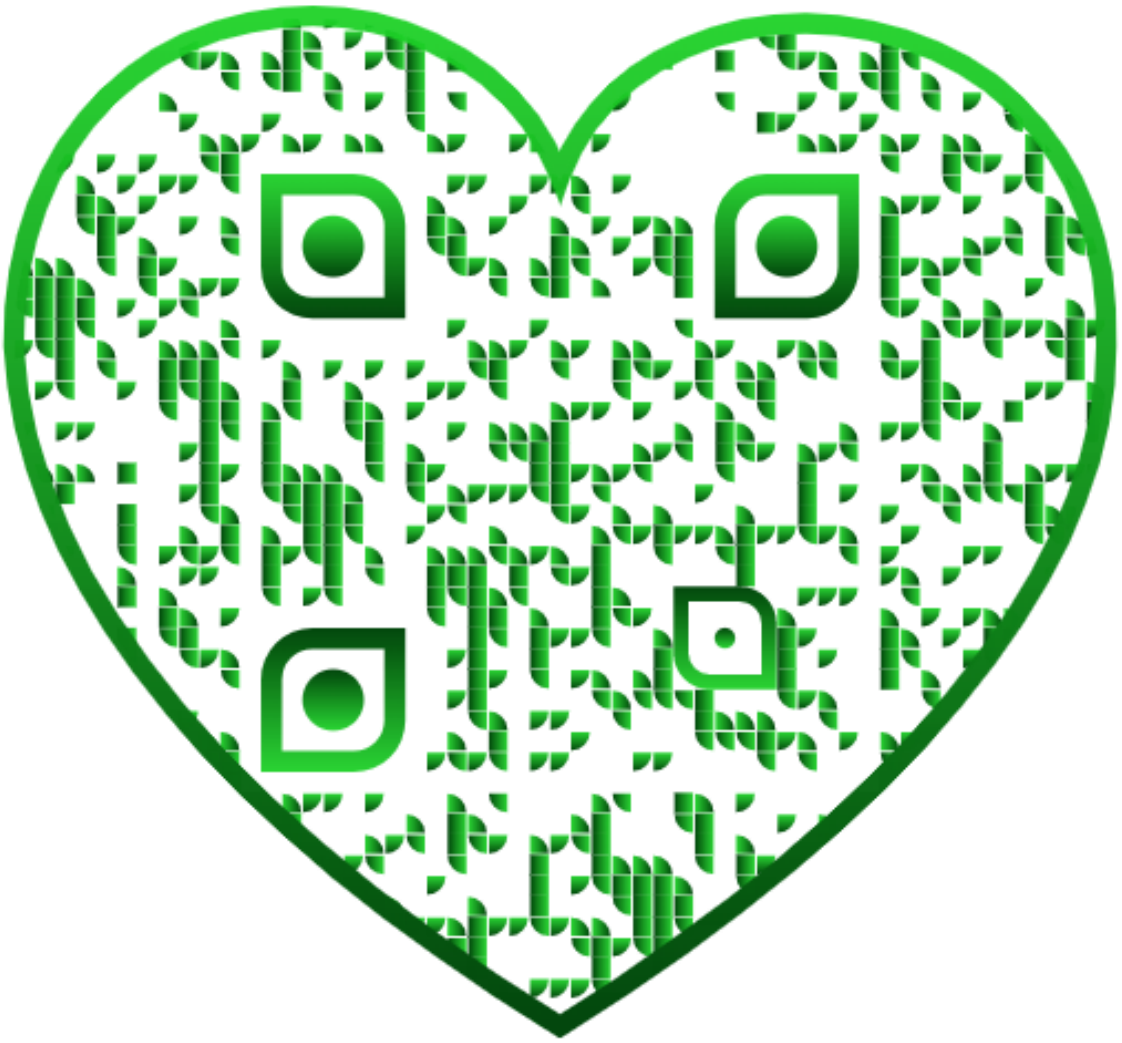

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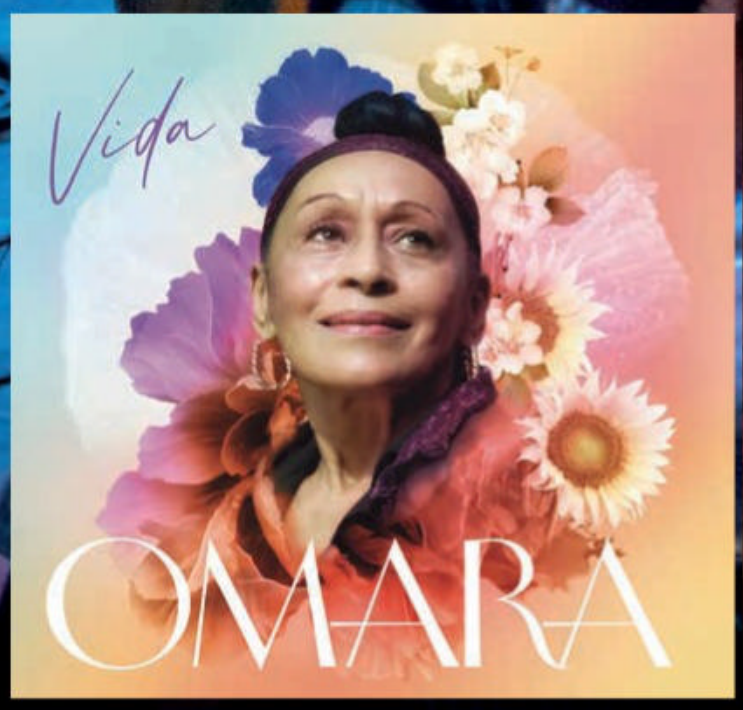

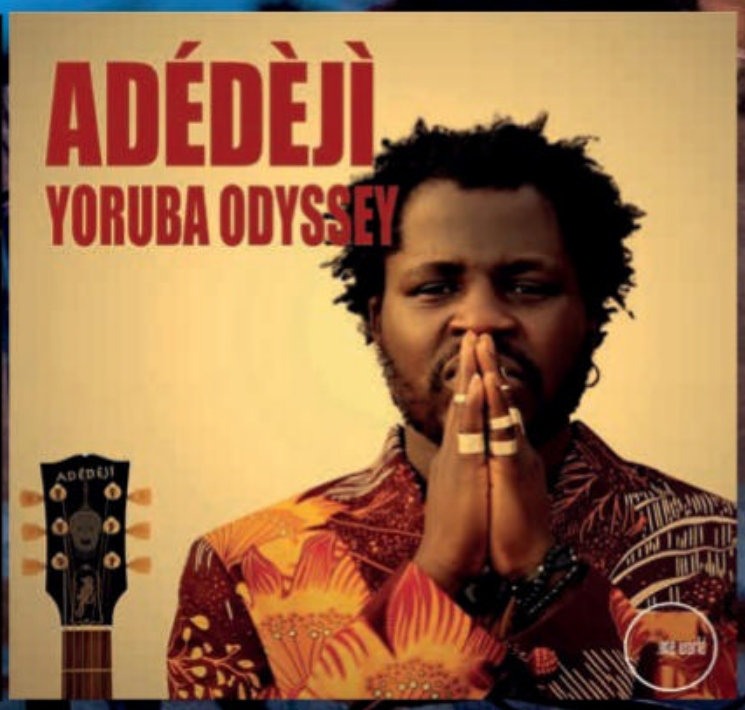

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# This is My Message to You-ou-ou

Last issue we decided to put the Ethiopian pianist and composer Emahoy Tsege-Mariam Gebru on our front cover, someone we had never featured before. And this issue is another first. It seems remarkable, but we have never run a feature on Bob Marley in our close to 25 years of existence. Of course, there is one marked difference between these two: whereas Emahoy's story may not be common knowledge, I'm sure we all feel as if we know what Marley represents, and are instantly familiar with his music. My hope with this feature is that we get even closer to the man by hearing from people who knew him at various points in his life and, thanks to Kate Simon's incredible photos, get to see him in moments of vulnerability or simply grabbing some downtime with friends. With a biopic of Marley soon to be hitting screens big and small – we speak to the film's director – it is as good a time as any to get to know the man behind the myth.

It's also worth remembering the messages in Marley's songs, and the very real role he played in Jamaican politics when he brokered for rival leaders Michael Manley and Edward Seaga during a time of societal upheaval to shake hands during his *One Love Peace Concert* in 1978. This issue of *Songlines* should have included an interview with an Israeli musician – agreed before the attack on Israel by Hamas – but after that incident the interview was cancelled. Right now the call is for an end to violence and to provide support for those who need it most, whether Israeli or Palestinian, something being urged by musicians, as we detail on p14, and ourselves here. At times it can feel naïve to espouse music during times of war but, as Marley has proven (and there are countless other examples), we must never underestimate its power in bringing people together.

This is my 10th issue as editor, marking my first year as editor of *Songlines*, and I wanted to thank everyone for reading, and for all the amazing feedback that has been sent our way. We already have lots of exciting plans for next year – which will include a jam-packed 25th-anniversary issue, that's coming next – but I'd also love to know your thoughts. Who should we be featuring? What issues are important to you? And do we really need to go on a diet? All suggestions to russ@songlines.co.uk.

Russ

*Russ Slater Johnson, Editor*

*P.S. Looking for a last-minute Christmas gift? Then make sure you take a look at our Christmas subscription offer – it's not too late! Go to magsubscriptions.com/xmas to find out more.*

## CONTRIBUTORS THIS ISSUE INCLUDE

**Jean Berry**
As a journalist and photographer, Jean has covered world and African music for magazines such as *Mondomix*, *Jeune Afrique* and *Courrier de l'Atlas*. This issue he travels to Lagos for a Felabration (p8)

**Charis McGowan**
Charis is a journalist and editor based in Chile, who reports on Latin American culture and politics for *The Guardian*, BBC, Al Jazeera and more. She meets Mon Laferte on p36

**Clyde Macfarlane**
Clyde is a music critic, travel writer and artist who lives on the Isle of Wight. This issue he speaks to Kate Simon about her photos of, and friendship with, Bob Marley (p30)

*Songlines* was launched in 1999 and is the definitive magazine for world music – music that has its roots in all parts of the globe, from Mali to Mexico, India to Iraq. Whether this music is defined as traditional, contemporary, folk or fusion, *Songlines* is the only magazine to truly represent and embrace it. However, *Songlines* is not just about music, but about how the music fits into the landscape; it's about politics, history and identity. Delivered in both print and digital formats, *Songlines*, through its extensive articles and reviews, is your essential and independent guide to a world of music and culture, whether you are starting on your journey of discovery or are already a seasoned fan.

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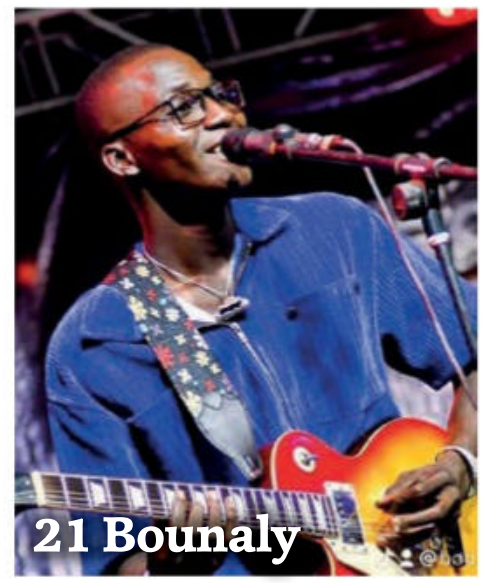
Bala Desejo

**28 Best Albums 2023**


Courtesy of Bounaly

**21 Bounaly**

Maite Fernandez Alonso

**22 Yann & Emilie Tiersen**

## UPFRONT


**06** Top of the World

**08** The Source
**Felabration, Jamala, Karine Polwart, Gig for Gaza, Don Letts**

**16** ***Songlines Music Awards 2023***
World Pioneer and Best Newcomer

**20** Take Note
**Julieta Laso**

**21** Introducing
**Bounaly**

**22** Spotlight
**Yann & Emilie Tiersen**

**24** Simon Says

**25** Letters

**26** Obituaries


## FEATURES


**28 Best Albums 2023**

**30 Bob Marley**

**36 Mon Laferte**

**40 Hidden Histories of Sea Shanties**

**42 Raphael Rogiński**


## REVIEWS


**44** Africa

**48** Americas

**52** Europe

**58** Asia

**59** Middle East

**60** Fusion

**64** Books

**65** Live


## REGULARS


**66** My World
**Ben Edge**

**68** Beginner's Guide
**Mark O'Connor**

**71** Dispatch from
**Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**

**72** Gig Guide

**76** Festival Guide

**79** Fireside Stories
**Gustavo Durán**

**81** **Eliza Carthy**'s
News of the Whirl

**82** Essential 10
**New Portuguese Albums**

Mayra Ortiz

**"There are days I feel like a bad artist, I'm a disaster, other days I feel so powerful"**

*Mon Laferte discusses the self-regeneration of her new album and the many forms that her music has taken, p36*

# TOP OF THE WORLD

On your free CD – our editors' selection of the best new releases reviewed in this issue

## TOP OF THE WORLD TRACKS

### 01 **Mutabaruka** 'Put It Down'

From *Black Attack* on Shanachie Entertainment

Reggae riddims and joyful African brass dance underneath Mutabaruka's gruff vocals and musing political rhetoric as he satirises the mindless following and repetition of convention. **See p63**

### 06 **Bholoja** 'Kwentiwa Yini'

From *Imphilo* on One World Records

Bholoja's voice is the star of the show, ringing clear and smooth above a delicate background of muted acoustic and electric guitars that provide the perfect, soulful complement. **See p44**

### 02 **Negarit Band** 'Arba Minch (Gamo)'

From *Origins* on Buda Musique

Ethiopian jazz drummer Teferi Assefa leads highlife joy, with choral voices, handclapping, grooving bass and a guitar solo from Sibhat Endale that'll have you swooning. **See p45**

### 07 **Corey Ledet Zydeco** 'Kofè T'fé Ça (feat Anders Osborne)'

From *Médikamen* on Nouveau Electric Records

Singing in Kouri-Vini (Louisiana Creole), the zydeco king gives us his own-style classic rock'n'roll, complete with bouncing accordion. **See p51**

### 03 **Aditya Prakash** '3AM'

From *Isolashun* on New Amsterdam Records

Shocking, staccato gasps bookmark this soundscape from the Karnatic musician. Hand percussion, double bass and punching, frenzied vocals build feverishly. Hypnotic. **See p58**

### 08 **Mito y Comadre** 'Va a Ver'

From *Guajirando* on ZZK Records

An infectious beat fuses a *soca* rhythm and African melodies in this hazy, laidback coastal number from the Colombia-based Venezuelan duo's debut. *¡Qué calor*! **See p49**

### 04 **Tamsin Elliott & Tarek Elazhary** 'El Hara'

From *So Far We Have Come* on Penny Fiddle Records

Elliott's beguiling accordion and Elazhary's masterful *oud* alluringly conjure Egyptian landscapes through a swirling conversation. **See p60**

### 09 **Makushin** 'No More Rush Hour'

From *Move into the Luminous* on Blackford Hill

Nancy Elizabeth's soft, ethereal vocals feed the absorbing ambience of this jazz-inflected, entrancing soundworld, with special props to saxophonist Martin Slattery for his burnished, soaring solo. **See p52**

### 05 **Hugh Masekela & Siparia Deltones** 'Lady'

From *Siparia to Soweto* on Gallo Records

The late, great South African trumpeter melds smooth brass, enchanting steel pan and his own warm voice in a bewitching take on Fela's classic. **See p62**

### 10 **Times New Román** 'Bánáti Angyal (Banatian Angel)'

From *Jól Élünk* on Times New Román

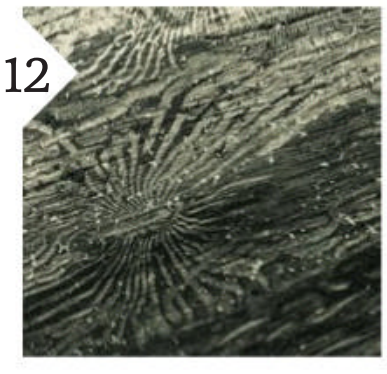
Clarinet intertwines happily with accordion and piano, Romanian Gypsy style. Commanding and playful, with deft, charming tempo and tonal shifts. **See p54**

## + BONUS TRACKS

11 **Julieta Laso**
'Que Me Quemen Tus Ojos (feat Macha y el Bloque Depresivo)'
From *Pata de Perra* on Otro Planeta

BUY NOW

Laso's rough, bewitching voice meets the warmth of producer Aldo 'Macha' Asenjo's in a glorious, playful anthem. **See p20**



12 **Raphael Rogiński**
'Electron'
From *Talàn* on Instant Classic

BUY NOW

The renowned experimental guitarist incorporates the sounds of his Eastern European heritage and travels into a profoundly moving, dazzling and technically brilliant masterpiece. **See p42**

13 **Bounaly**
'Ma Cherie'
From *Dimanche à Bamako* on Sahel Sounds

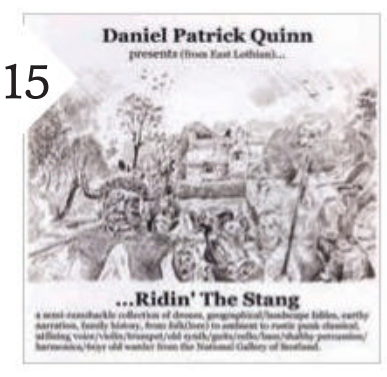
BUY NOW

Chatter and laughter background this live recording of Malian guitar-shredding delirium at a Bamako wedding – let the atmosphere seep through, evoking summer celebrations past. **See p21**

14 **Mark & Maggie O'Connor**
'Verbovaya Doschechka (A Ukrainian Folk Song)'
From *Verbovaya Doschechka (A Ukrainian Folk Song)* on Mark & Maggie O'Connor

BUY NOW

A poignant tune played with heart. Find sheet music at markoconnor.com. **See p68**




15 **Daniel Patrick Quinn**
'The Burryman (feat Duncan Grahl)'
From *Ridin' the Stang* on Daniel Patrick Quinn / Suilven Recordings

BUY NOW

South Queensferry local, Grahl, laughs with compatriots as he tells the story of The Burryman over eerily droning violin and sparse percussion. **See p66**

Sylvie Tata

**" [I came across] a druid ceremony taking place. I describe it now as a druidic epiphany because it awoke something within me that started an obsession"**

*Turn to p66 for the full My World interview with artist and British folklore documentarian Ben Edge*

**TOP OF THE WORLD ALBUM DOWNLOADS!**

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Ezra Collective at the New Afrika Shrine

REPORT FROM NIGERIA

# Feel the Felabrations

*Ezra Collective, Togo All Stars and the Kuti family were among those performing at Lagos' Felabration, an event which grows every year*

No doubt anyone witnessing Felabration in Lagos would be struck by the passion that Fela still arouses. Beginning on October 9, the annual event took over the New Afrika Shrine for a week with dozens of bands and singers taking to the stage to play their music and pay tribute. "My telephone is literally exploding, we don't even have enough time for everyone," says Yeni Kuti, Fela's daughter, who launched the club's third version with brother Femi back in 2000, three years after their father's passing.

"The Shrine is open every day, the gates never close," Yeni tells me backstage, where she is accompanied by Femi. He's watching the show on a special channel from DSTV that broadcasts the event throughout Africa, every now and again heading to the stage himself to make a cameo in someone else's set. "Femi performs twice a week, Seun and Mádé once a month, except for tour periods," Yeni continues. "And external artists come and produce their shows... Young stars like Burna Boy, Davido or Wizkid have started here."

African greats such as Lucky Dube, Hugh Masekela, Baaba Maal and Gangbe Brass Band have also graced the stage.

At the Felabration this year are Nigerian artists including Ara, a female singer and

Mádé Kuti & The Movement

Yeni Kuti

Jean Berry, Anna Šolcová © One World Records

'talking drum queen' just back from a summer tour of Spain, as well as Africa Band and Wura Samba. Some also fly in from abroad, like Jamaica's Mining Gold Studio crew... and then there is Ezra Collective, the British jazz sensations led by London-born sons of Nigerian parents, Femi and TJ Koleoso, who were recently awarded the Mercury Music Prize. *'A moment we have dreamt about since we started the band,'* says the group on Instagram. *'Playing in Lagos, Nigeria. Home of Afrobeat. Such an honour,'* with drummer Femi Koleoso adding: *'Thank you to one of the greatest musical families in history for always showing love and bringing me through. Long live Fela.'* The group showed their love for Afrobeat when they covered Fela's 'Lady' earlier this year. It is nice to see that the group's Femi has managed to pick up some records too in Lagos: '*After several attempts. I managed to find 10 original pressed, Lagos edition Fela Kuti records. Dream come true.'* After a show at the Shrine, with Femi Kuti guesting, the group played Lagos' Freedom Park ahead of a huge homecoming gig at London's Royal Albert Hall.

But Felabration is not confined to just The Shrine, it takes over other parts of town including a fancy Victoria Island brewery which also hosts shows and has launched a new beer named after one of Fela's hits, 'Shakara'. The packaging was designed by Lemi Ghariokwu, the legendary artist who designed many of Fela's covers. Freedom Park, a former colonial jail on Lagos Island, also hosts performances all week, including Nigerian veterans Prince Eji Oyewole and Ggoyega Adelalja, the young talents of Tenstrings Music School and Lagos' famous traditional Yoruba group Malaika, gathering together 21 musicians to Felabrate.

"Fela's influence on the region's music is priceless," says Leopold Messan from Togo All Stars, who perform their new album, *Spirits,* at the event. "We do highlife, Afro funk and Afrobeat, but in a different format than Fela's, as we introduce elements of the *vodoun* tradition, typical of Togo and Benin. That's our specificity. Having said that, Afrobeat is not only a music, it's a state of mind that we share including spirituality, speaking out against injustice, African unity..."

"That's the best Felabration so far, it gets better every year," says Seun Kuti later, performing his full show on the final Saturday, and covering 'Coffin for Head of State' and 'Zombie'. "I always start my show with a Fela tune, to show respect to the man. Afrobeat is now a global movement, and my new band gathering multiple origins reflects that," says the Black President's youngest son.

Seun's next album will be released in 2024, with guest artists and a very interesting producer all to be confirmed soon. Mádé, Femi's son, will also release his second album next year. Femi says his next, his first ever recorded in Lagos, in the home studio he built during COVID-19, is "about halfway." Add to that another boxset of Fela's music on Partisan Records – *Volume 6*, curated by Idris Elba – and it's clear: now, as much as ever, Afrobeat is coming.

*JEAN BERRY*

Clockwise from above: Togo All Stars; dancer during Femi Kuti's set; Seun & Femi


**JUST ANNOUNCED!**

**Songlines @ 25**

**Barbican, London, March 25 2024, 7.30pm**

*Special anniversary concert celebrating 25 years of Songlines with an extraordinary line-up!*

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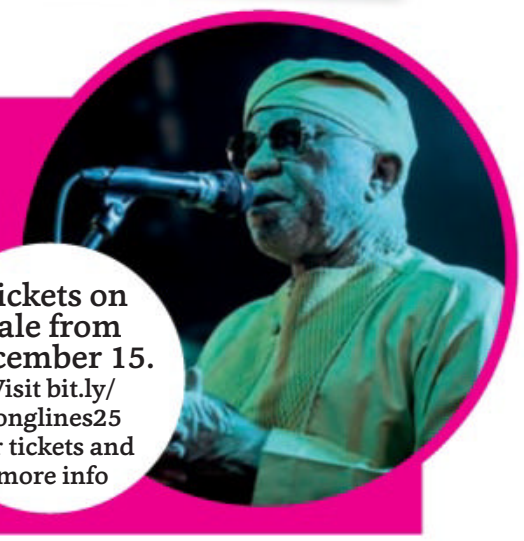
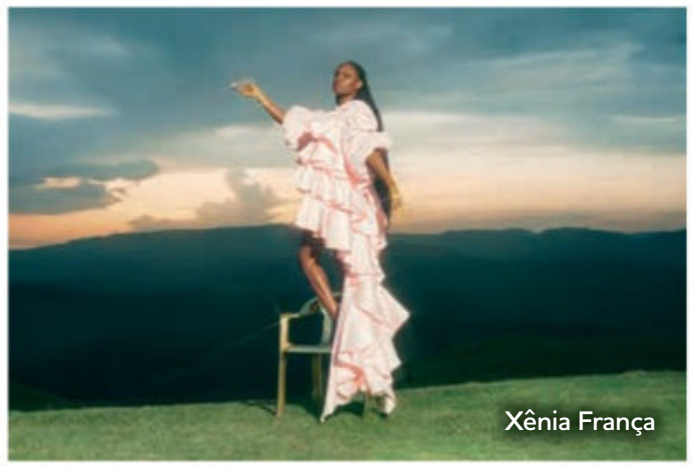


**Tickets on sale from December 15.**
Visit bit.ly/songlines25 for tickets and more info

Kat Kleve

## A Guiding Light

The Bristol Beacon (formerly Colston Hall) reopened in November after extensive renovations to make it more accessible and allow for even more gigs. One of many upcoming shows – see our Gig Guide for more – is *Forgotten Songs & Stories* on January 31, with a 15-strong ensemble performing songs created by diverse women across Bristol.



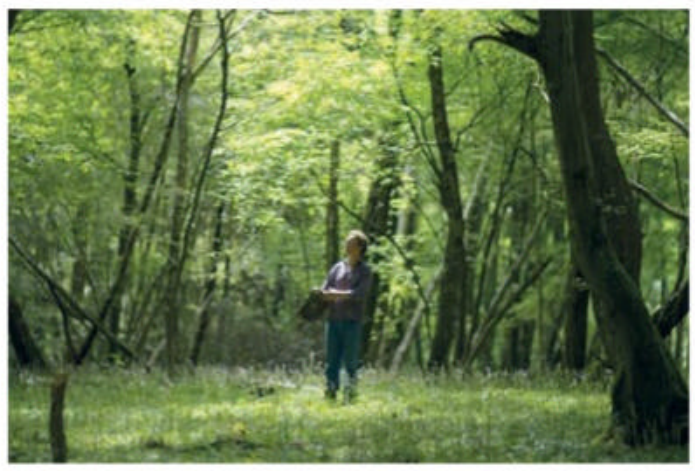

## Lati-NO!

The Latin Grammys took place in Seville, Spain, attracting criticism for being held in Europe before Latin America. Some have accused the awards of being too Europe-friendly, though without Rosalía nominated the big awards were split between Latin American artists Karol G, Natalia Lafourcade and Shakira & Bizarrap, with Brazil's Xênia França getting a coveted Portuguese-language award.

Rich Gilligan

## Joy Be With You All

Much-hyped indie-rock supergroup Boy Genius have collaborated with Irish folk duo Ye Vagabonds on a cover of Irish traditional ballad 'The Parting Glass'. The release is a tribute to Sinead O'Connor with all profits going to the Aisling Project, an after-school club for disadvantaged kids in Dublin chosen by the Sinead O'Connor estate.



Adam Loften

## Opening Night-ingale

*Emergence Magazine*'s *Shifting Landscapes* exhibition at London's Oxo Tower Wharf (December 1-10) offered a first opportunity to see *The Nightingale's Song*, a film by Adam Loften and Emmanuel Vaughan-Lee that follows Sam Lee as he explores nightingales' roles in English heritage. Lee also released 'Bushes and Briars', a single from his upcoming *Songdreaming* album (out March 15).

## IT'S HAPPENING

**CHRISTY MOORE** (Feb 16) has announced a fundraising gig in Dublin in aid of Médecins Sans Frontières' emergency regional fund for Gaza... **THE MARY WALLOPERS** (March 13-17) have confirmed five new UK tour dates, adding shows in Nottingham, Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle and Bristol... Lila Downs, Ana Tijoux, Los Tigres del Norte and La Yegros are the first names announced for London's **LA LINEA 24** (April)... Roundhouse's **IN THE ROUND FESTIVAL** (April 18-27) will include performances from Vashti Bunyan, Lonnie Holley, Matana Roberts and Lucy Rose as well as a tribute to Joni Mitchell hosted by Cerys Matthews and featuring Kate Stables, Sam Amidon and others... **KATHERINE PRIDDY** (May 1-17) has announced an extensive tour of the UK and Ireland in May to support upcoming album *The Pendulum Swing*... Angeline Morrison, Cerys Hafana and The Gentle Good have been announced for **FOCUS WALES** (May 9-11)... **THE REELING** (June 8-9), Scotland's newest traditional music festival, is to return with an impressive line-up including Ímar, Brìghde Chaimbeul, Aidan O'Rourke, Kris Drever, Kinnaris Quintet and Gnoss... an immersive **BLACK BRITISH MUSIC AND SOUND SYSTEM CULTURE EXHIBITION** (2025) will open V&A East, the V&A's new East London venue, in 2025

## NO MORE TROUBLE

*Currently on the Songlines stereo...*

**Sheherazaad 'Mashoor'**
Debut single from American, South Asian-descendent, artist. Classical guitar, percussion and Sheherazaad's beautiful, intoxicating voice.

**Lagos Thugs**
**'Innocent Blood'**
Officially approved by the Kuti family, this is Lagos' latest Afrobeat sensation. Precise polyrhythms, powerful vocals, warm 70s production. Classy.

**Orchestra Baobab '50 Ans'**
Do these lot ever lose it? This single celebrating their 50 years (and counting) is pure Afro-Cuban gold. A new album is imminent in 2024.

**Abdul & The Gang**
**'Oran Drive'**
*Chaabi*-funk from the Moroccan-French group; supposedly inspired by the film *Drive*, if set in Essaouira!

**Angeline Morrison**
**'It's Not Fine'**
Delicate, with deceptively, cutting lyrics. This was available on a 7" that sold out instantly, with her cover of 'Bushes and Briars' on the reverse.

**Mista Savona**
***Horns of Cuba EP***
Instrumental EP from the Australian producer and his Caribbean crew. When that crew includes Sly & Robbie, plus Buena Vista and Irakere alumni, you're in for a treat.

Charles Marlangue

# No Contest

*In 2016, Jamala unexpectedly won Eurovision with a song decrying the deportation of Crimean Tatars. She now returns with an album going even further, mapping out her beloved Crimea*

Andriy Kharlamov

Ukrainian singer Jamala is dressed in a flamboyant wrap-around ballgown. There are back projections, haze and dramatic lights. This is a high tech, glitzy show. You'd never guess that shortly before this TV stream began from Kyiv Opera House, Jamala and the orchestra were hiding in a bomb shelter.

"This is my attempt to show off my homeland," says Susana Jamaladinova, better known as Jamala. "I want to open to the world a culture, language and history that it doesn't know." She is speaking about *Qırım* (Crimea), her recent album and her home. As her homeland has been occupied by Russia since 2014, she's recorded 14 Crimean Tatar songs in arrangements (by Artem Roschenko) for symphony orchestra and five folk musicians. It puts these distinctively Turkic-sounding songs in a lush orchestral setting.

Jamala was actually born in Osh in Kyrgyzstan, as Stalin deported the Crimean Tatars to Central Asia in 1944. But in post-Soviet times many returned. After a few years in Militopol, Ukraine, Jamala moved with her family to Kuchuk Ozen (Malorichenske since 1945) in Crimea, which she considers her home. Her mother is a piano teacher and her father an accordionist and choir director. There was music at home 24 hours a day. She went to Kyiv to the music academy where she graduated as an opera singer in 2001. She may have premiered the *Qırım* album at the Kyiv Opera House in May this year, but her musical career has been in pop, with just a sprinkle of Crimean Tatar songs on previous albums.

Jamala gained fame when she won *Eurovision* in 2016 with '1944', an anthemic song about the deportation of the Tatars. The lyrics go: '*They come to your house / They kill you all and say / We're not guilty, not guilty.*' Though political songs are not permitted in *Eurovision*, this was widely seen as a protest against Russia's 2014 invasion of Crimea. "Honestly even now I don't how this song could be included in this contest," Jamala admits.

The song's chorus is in Crimean Tatar. But Jamala believes the emotion won it. There can't be many more personal songs in *Eurovision* history. The song was written in memory of her great grandmother who was deported on May 18, 1944. "She told me about it when I was six years old. It was 5am, she and her five kids – four sons and one daughter – were forced into a cattle train with no food and water, for Central Asia. Her little daughter died during this trip and when she asked soldiers to bury the body they refused and threw it out of the train."

Jamala hasn't visited Crimea since the 2014 invasion and didn't collect the songs on *Qırım* personally, but "my father is a folk musician, and a lot of his friends helped me… They found recordings, books and people who knew the melodies exactly. But it was hard to find."

Jamala says this is the first ever Crimean Tatar album, which isn't quite true, but the few others are more ethnographic. *Qırım* certainly breaks new ground presenting Crimean songs in this epic orchestral format and bringing them to an international audience.

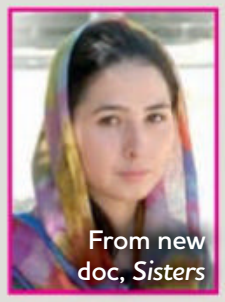
What Jamala has constructed is a type of musical map of Crimea with the 14 songs all from different areas – see qirim.jamala.ua/en. Crimea is small, but Jamala hears a different identity in every region. "The people who live close to the sea, their melodies are soft and sweet like honey. Bahçesaray [in the mountains] is powerful and rugged. Each region has a different dialect and mentality."

*SIMON BROUGHTON*

**BREAKING:** *After we spoke to Jamala she was placed on Russia's wanted list according to the independent Russian human rights website Mediazone. The Russian news Telegram channel Shot later said that she had been added for posting 'fake' news about the massacre that happened in the Ukrainian town of Bucha in 2022.*

# THE GLOBE AT A GLANCE

**AFGHANISTAN:** a new documentary, *Sisters*, available online (via Amazon Prime), tells the story of Zohra, Afghanistan's first female orchestra. The film was directed by and stars Dan Blackwell… **BELARUS:** Tor Band's three members have been sentenced to between seven-and-a-half and nine years in prison for crimes including inciting hatred, discrediting Belarus and insulting the president, according to human rights group Viasna. Tor Band were a visible protest group following the country's contentious 2020 elections… **CANADA:** the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation have questioned Buffy Saint-Marie's claim to be an Indigenous Cree woman through an extensive investigation detailed online. Saint-Marie claims to have been adopted with no record of her parents, which CBC claims to be a fabrication. Saint-Marie has denied the accusations… **FIJI:** hip-hop and reggae artist Ju Ben has become the first Fijian to win the Pacific Break competition for new music from the Pacific region… **FINLAND:** *kantele* player, singer and member of Okra Playground, Maija Kauhanen, won the 2023 Nordic Council Music Prize… **FRANCE:** a new animated biopic of Édith Piaf, simply titled *Edith*, has been announced. It will incorporate recordings of her most famous songs and archival footage. AI will be used to cast Piaf as the film's narrator… **ICELAND:** Björk has teamed up with Rosalía for a new single, 'Oral', completed after Björk read a report on the impact of Norwegian salmon farming on Iceland's native ecosystems. Profits will go to Icelandic residents fighting a legal battle against the Norwegian farms… **URUGUAY:** Spotify have announced that they will leave Uruguay after the country updated its copyright laws to state that all authors, composers and performers should receive '*fair and equitable remuneration*' for reproductions of their work



From new doc, *Sisters*

# Letting The Light In

*Kings Place's new artist-in-residence talks about the programme she's curated for Scotland Unwrapped, involving poetry, birdsong, folklore and choral euphoria*

Karine Polwart has been chosen as the Artist-in-Residence for *Scotland Unwrapped*, a year-long celebration of Scottish music and spoken word at Kings Place in London. *Scotland Unwrapped* will see performances of innovative contemporary composers, folk musicians and Scottish classical ensembles, as well as poetry representing Scotland's vibrant literary scene, throughout 2024.

Polwart, a five-time BBC Radio 2 Folk Award winner and a leading voice in the Scottish folk movement, is curating two weekends across the year. When I speak with her in October, she tells me she is "hunkered down" just south of Edinburgh where they are experiencing the tail end of Storm Babet.

Looking forward to *Scotland Unwrapped*, she explains how much she likes the model of a more sustained relationship between a venue and an artist: "Normally we fly by on tour and it's a very fleeting, ephemeral relationship," she says. "But this way, you get to have a more meaningful relationship with audiences and you have a chance to programme other artists you love."

Artists to appear at Kings Place in 2024 will include Kris Drever, Fara and Gnoss. Polwart's role is to curate two weekends that 'bookend' the year. She begins her residency with *Come Away In*, a weekend of performances and workshops (January 12-13) that celebrate the traditions of hospitality, conviviality and refuge. Pianist Dave Milligan and Scottish-Caribbean poet Courtney Stoddart will join Polwart on stage for their first London performance. Polwart and Milligan recorded the 2021 album *Still as Your Sleeping* while Stoddart's poetry, which speaks of the young, Black diaspora experience in Scotland, impressed Polwart when they met at Celtic Connections in 2023.

The second curated weekend, *Sing to the Dark*, includes an interactive choral project featuring community singers, audience members and guest artists. This takes place at the start of November, a time of winter rituals, coinciding with the Celtic festival of Samhain. "I wanted to play around with the whole idea of the descent into darkness and the emergence out of darkness," says Polwart. This is a recurring theme in her recent work. Last year, she collaborated with sound designer and composer Pippa Murphy on a three-part BBC Radio 4 documentary called *Seek the Light*, which combined science, music and folklore. *Sing to the Dark* will also involve Heal and Harrow (Rachel Newton and Lauren MacColl's project on the Scottish witch trials) as well as young Gaelic singer-composer Kim Carnie.

On both weekends Polwart is involved in a workshop capacity including, in January, a song workshop and a family storytelling workshop called *Queen of the Birds*. Prior to becoming a professional musician Polwart worked with children and throughout her career has done music-based work with young people: "Like a lot of folk musicians, it's a big part of what I do. It might look like we're touring all the time but a lot of us are working in schools and community settings."

For the November weekend, Polwart and Murphy will perform with 100 singers, in collaboration with the Nest Collective's Fire Choir. "The layout of the hall lends itself to the whole upper level being a massed choir," she says. "The performance is going to have a ritual arc, almost like heading into darkness and back out again, using the whole space in an immersive way. The venue has fabulous acoustics and a really terrific sound system that you can configure in different ways."

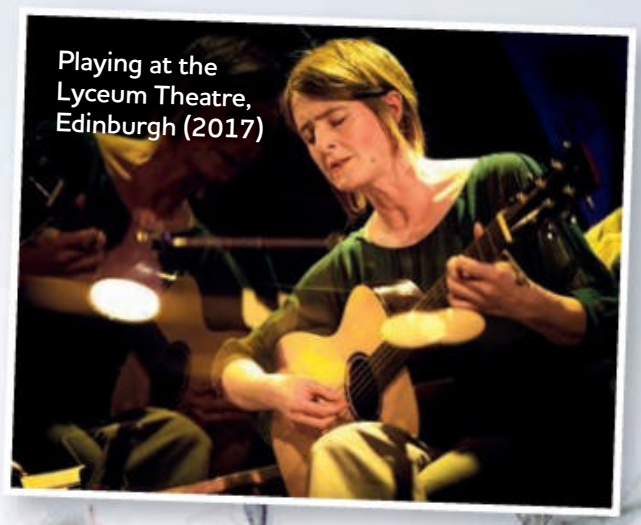
In fact, Polwart can't hide her enthusiasm for Kings Place which, she says, "has done a really good job in trying to represent Scotland in its cultural and geographic diversity. There are only a handful of venues that are

willing to programme things that are more bespoke. One of the interesting things about Kings Place is [that] they're programming across music, spoken word, literature, ideas. They've also got a commitment to developing emerging artists and taking risks."

Polwart is an artist working across several media, juggling multiple projects. She tells me that, for the past few years, she has been experimenting with the shift between song and spoken word. "I'm interested in enquiry and questions, and music is one way of making sense of the world, but so is documentary and spoken word, so I'm interested in all these forms."

*TONY GILLAM*

**+ MORE** *Full details of Scotland Unwrapped can be found at kingsplace.co.uk/whats-on/scotland-unwrapped/*

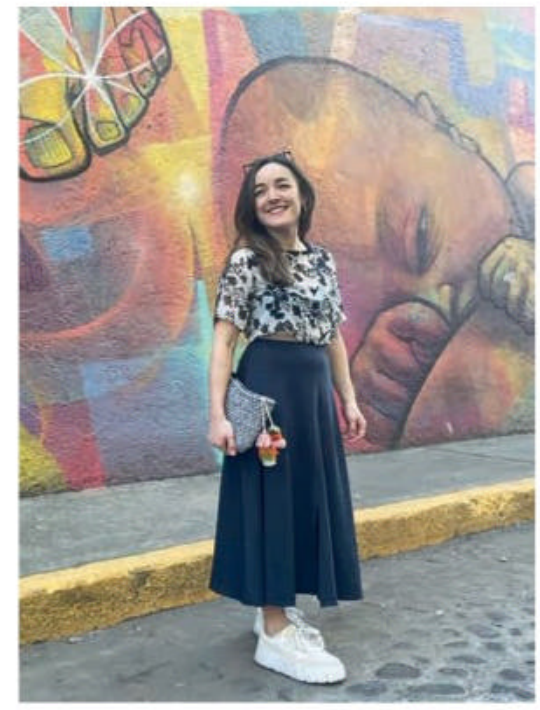


Playing at the Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh (2017)

Sandy Butler

# Routes to Roots

*Over the next few issues we'll be bringing you updates from Scottish violinist and composer* ***Catriona Price*** *as she takes her latest project to Latin America*



After a year and a half of planning, many Zoom calls, and a lot of learning, I'm writing to you from the picturesque town of San Miguel de Allende in the central Mexican Highlands. I'm at the start of the next stage in the development of Routes to Roots – an organisation aiming to connect communities through intercultural music collaborations.

In 2013-2015 my Twelfth Day partner Esther Swift and I embarked on trips to Malawi, Québec, Brazil and Mongolia – the start of this big idea of sharing folk music around the world. Those trips blew our young minds and we decided to put the project on ice while we began our careers. I spent this past year in The Global Leaders Institute for Arts Innovation figuring out what Routes to Roots could become. During a residency in Chile this April, I met the cultural manager Christine Lauck. She was about to move to Mexico, and with our experience in Chile, what better place to take next steps than in Latin America.

Over the next two months, I'll be testing the ideas we have been developing over the past year (and decade!), creating new music with musicians from these two culturally rich countries and developing a protocol for intercultural collaboration through youth music workshops. Meanwhile, Esther is working on some exciting projects with international communities at home in Scotland. Our hope is that Routes to Roots will eventually become an artist-led organisation hosting many different intercultural collaborations in many different contexts.

We would like to invite *Songlines* readers to join us on this adventure. We want to create an organisation that uses the power of music to bring humanity closer together. Something that can transcend socio-political divides and demonstrate the potency art can have in building understanding between communities. Please do get in touch and follow along on my Instagram @catrionapricemusic, and in the next issues of *Songlines*.

# Great Scots!

The 21st MG ALBA Scots Trad Music Awards took place on December 10 with a ceremony in Dundee that featured performances from Karine Polwart & Dave Milligan, Mànran and The Peatbog Faeries. The big winners were Duncan Chisholm who won Album of the Year for *Black Cuillin*, Iona Fyfe who won Citty Finlayson Scots Singer of the Year, and Blazin' Fiddles, who won Scottish Folk Band of the Year. There was also the inaugural Sue Wilson New Writer Award, sponsored by *Songlines*, and created in honour of Sue Wilson, who recently passed away. Sue was a great journalist who wrote for us from the beginning, her writing appearing in our first-ever issue . She was always sharing her love and enthusiasm for Scottish music, whether in our pages, or for *The Scotsman*, *Scotland on Sunday*, *The Sunday Herald*, *The Guardian* or *The Independent*. She was a Celtic Connections regular, with the festival paying tribute to her: '*We will miss her joyous spirit, passionate love of folk music, and warm presence.*' For the first Sue Wilson New Writer Award, we are happy to announce Angus MacPhail as winner – as a prize his writing will feature in future issues of *Songlines*. We would also like to thank Alana MacInnes and Alan Murray for their submissions. *RSJ*

Sue Wilson

Sean Purser

# Songs for Peace

*Lankum, Lisa O'Neill and The Mary Wallopers play a benefit gig in Dublin as artists around the world respond to the violence in Palestine and Israel*

The events that have taken place over recent weeks in Palestine and Israel have horrified and devastated many. At the time of writing, the death toll in Israel is estimated at around 1,200 people and in Palestine at around 15,000 people. With a temporary ceasefire just ended and conflict resuming, the future of the Palestinian and Israeli people remains hugely uncertain and concerning.

On November 28, some of the biggest names in Irish music came together in Dublin to raise funds for medical aid in Gaza and stand forthrightly against hate. The headliners were Lisa O'Neill, Lankum, The Mary Wallopers and Damien Dempsey, with barrister Joe Brolly MCing. A collective from Irish Artists for Palestine began proceedings. Roisin el Cherif, whose father is Palestinian, conducted a moving performance in Arabic, and spoke briefly about her relationship to the territory and its history. An ambulance worker who has spent much time in Gaza recited a letter. Urging solidarity, she commanded, '*Never the gun before the child.*'

Lisa O'Neill sang a deep, resonant version of Mahalia Jackson's 'Trouble of the World' before performing some of her most wonderfully empathetic work, including the spine-chilling 'Rock the Machine', a song pleading helplessness in the face of greed and power. She also sang about Mary Harris (commonly known as Mother Jones), an Irish union organiser and teacher who lived in the US in the 19th century. O'Neill's rough voice sang Jones' slogan with the full force of her conviction: '*Pray for the dead / And fight like hell for the living.*'

Ibrahim Alagha, an Irish citizen who recently escaped Palestine with his family, appeared on stage with Brolly after O'Neill. When asked to speak about his experience, Alagha told the 7,000+ audience members that his children, after weeks of living on thimbles of water, were afraid to drink whole cups once rescued. And although his life has returned more or less to normal, his three year old is still afraid of closed doors, windows and potential explosions.

Lankum appeared next. Though they have had a hugely successful year, the group recently had a show at a German festival cancelled due to their solidarity with Palestine, the festival stating clearly that the cancellation was due to the group's '*political stance.*' Introducing them, Brolly reflected, "It's outrageous that peace has now become a dirty word."

And peace is on the minds of many. Shortly after the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, Israeli artist Liraz cancelled her WOMEX performance. Five loved ones were killed in the attack. She apologised for the cancellation on Instagram, writing, '*I pray for healing and peace. It's time to stop everything, if not for us then for our children.*' Israeli rock musician Dudu Tassa cancelled his tour with Jonny Greenwood, including a London show at Pitchfork Music Festival, for their album *Jarak Qaribak*. On Instagram he explained that due to the events of October 7, '*Jarak Qaribak is unable to undertake the round of performances it planned for Europe. The situation is painful but hopefully one day we will return to normalcy filled with music and love.*'

Music and love were, perhaps, the main events of the gig for Gaza. During their performance, Radie Peat of Lankum explained to the stadium, "[It] broke out hearts and hardened our hearts a little, what happened in Germany. But this is just beautiful." They played an awe-inspiring set, dotted with a number of tracks from their latest, award-winning *False Lankum*. They were followed by The Mary Wallopers whose Andrew Hendy sang a stirring a capella of 'The Battle of Clontarf', the chorus of which runs: '*Do me justice, treat me fair / And I won't be discontented / And I won't be laughed at anywhere / But fairly represented.*' "With all the hate in Ireland at the moment," The Wallopers declared, referring to recent far-right disturbances in Dublin, "it's great to see people come out for humanity." The evening ended with Damien Dempsey pulling out some crowd favourites, the whole room singing into his microphone. Between songs calling for peace and love above all, he echoed others' sentiments as he told those gathered, "Children, both Palestinian and [Israeli], deserve a better future." The crowd concurred, uproariously, emotionally.

*EMMA RYCROFT*

Clockwise from top: Lisa O'Neill; Irish Artists for Palestine collective's guitarist; The Mary Wallopers' Ken Mooney; fellow Walloper, Andrew Hendy; Lankum's Radie Peat

Molly Keane @mollykeanephoto

# The 4 Corners and Centre of **Don Letts**' Universe

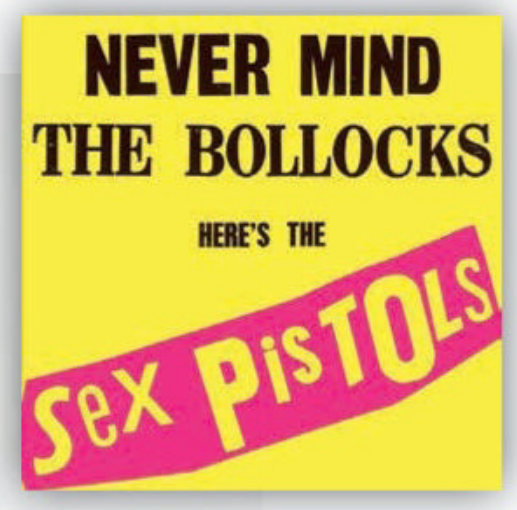
*Some tricky choices for the British DJ and musician: "To ask somebody who's as old as rock and roll to choose his five albums is impossible, a top 50 would be easier!"*

## Marvin Gaye
*What's Going On*
(Tamla, 1971)

These are my honest-to-God go-to's, starting with *What's Going On*... It was a total breakaway from the optimistic sounds of Motown, it was Marvin rebelling against that. It was made as a concept album, actually they called it a song cycle. He took inspiration from his brother who'd returned from the Vietnam War, and the things affecting him. It was a very social and political album, and pre-empted a lot of the ecological themes of today. I mean, 'Mercy, Mercy Me (The Ecology)', unfortunately it's still topical now, if not more than ever. It also came at a time when the hi-fi had come into its own, so the production is really interesting, it's making the most of separation and panning, and all that stuff. It's a work of god-like genius.

## The Wailers
*Catch a Fire*
(Island Records, 1973)

*Catch a Fire* was produced under interesting circumstances... They found themselves stuck in the UK and their manager hustled a meeting with Chris Blackwell, who gave [Marley] a small amount of money to finish the album. Bob, Bunny and Peter finished the album to a degree in Jamaica then sent the tapes to the UK where [Marley] and Chris did overdubs on keyboards and guitars. That guitar work, that we'd never heard on a reggae record before, made my ears prick up. The purists didn't like it, but sometimes it's fun to piss off the purists. The socio-political themes Bob was dealing with translated perfectly to London, as first-generation Black British, they soundtracked my life .




## THE CENTRE

## Sex Pistols
*Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols*
(Virgin, 1977)

You know, I hate to be predictable but *Never Mind The Bollocks*... is a big part of my life because if I hadn't have bumped into this, the whole punk rock thing with its DIY ethos, I might not be here today, do you know what I mean? It made me realise that you didn't just need to be a fan and stand in the wings. If you had an idea and you were brave enough, you could be part of this thing. In 1977, the popular music seemed a million miles from the feeling on the street, the people needed a new soundtrack that was relevant to their situation. I had mine, I had reggae, so that eased my pain, but my white mates weren't so lucky and they set about creating a soundtrack for the people. It's still a great fucking record, it's anthemic, it's rebellious, it's all the things young people want.

*INTERVIEW BY RUSS SLATER JOHNSON*

## Public Enemy
*It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*
(Def Jam Recordings, 1988)

There's a quote from Chuck D that says he wanted to make the hip-hop version of Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On,* and I think he did. Sonically it's a million miles away, you have the Bomb Squad throwing sounds and sirens at you, it feels like the city's exploding. Like the Sex Pistols record, it wiped everything out of the way with its sonics. And then there was Chuck D's lyrical content that was bang on the money, calling it as he saw it... heavy socio-political content, what did he describe it as? '*The hip-hop version of CNN.*' It got rid of that macho bling thing that was coming into hip-hop. Chuck D was like the hip-hop preacher man. All I know is this record struck me immediately.

## Sufjan Stevens
*Illinois*
(Asthmatic Kitty, 2005)

This might sound like a curveball, but... I'm not as predictable as I might seem. I'm Black British, I grew up listening to reggae and bass, but also pop music, and I have a penchant for melody, harmonies and lyrics; I love great lyrics, and orchestration, and this record is a combination of all those things, things I probably deemed from Dylan and Joni Mitchell and in more modern times, Father John Misty and Rufus Wainwright. This record was informed by this brother [Sufjan] doing research into the quirks of Illinois and its religious and geographical background; I didn't know that until reading up on him later on. It just directly spoke to me on a sonic level.

**+ ALBUM** *Don Letts' new album Outta Sync is reviewed on p62*

# SONGLINES MUSIC AWARDS 2023

The anticipation is over as we reveal the final two winners in the *Songlines Music Awards* 2023, marking another great year of worldwide music

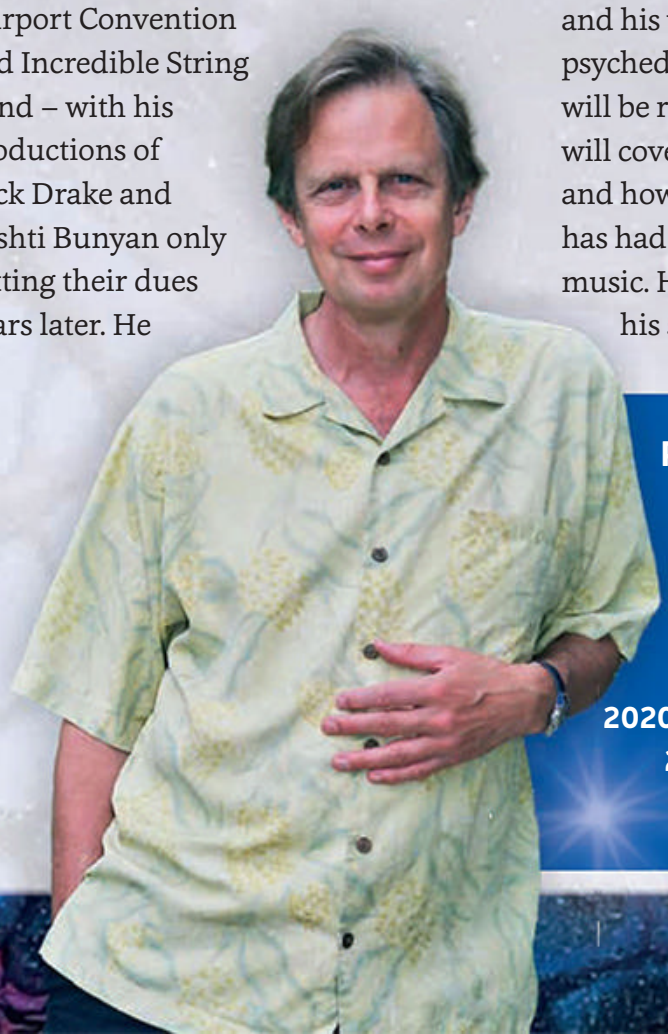
## *WORLD PIONEER*
## JOE BOYD

"I'm very honoured," are the first words that come out of Joe's mouth when we tell him of the award. Of course, it can't have been too unexpected, considering what a vital champion of both folk and world music Boyd has been over the years, and how many times he's featured in our pages.

Born in Boston, Massachusetts, Boyd got his start fresh out of college in 1964 when he was asked to manage a tour for Muddy Waters and Sister Rosetta Tharpe. He then worked at the Newport Jazz Festival in 1965 when Dylan fever was at its peak, before moving to London to open the UK office of Elektra Records. In London he started the UFO Club, the hub of 'psychedelic London' and recorded two of the club's regular bands, Pink Floyd and Soft Machine. However, it was for two of the biggest folk groups of the time that he made his name: Fairport Convention and Incredible String Band – with his productions of Nick Drake and Vashti Bunyan only getting their dues years later. He would also produce Toots & The Maytals and South African saxophonist Dudu Pukwana before starting his own label, Hannibal Records, in 1980. Kate & Anna McGarrigle recorded for Hannibal, as well as many former Fairport Convention members (Richard & Linda Thompson's early 80s albums being the big sellers). The label increasingly looked at artists from outside of the UK and North America, releasing albums by Muzsikás, Ketama and Kanda Bongo Man with Boyd producing or co-producing records by Ivo Papasov & His Bulgarian Wedding Band, Toumani Diabaté and ¡Cubanismo!. In recent years he has hasn't stopped, producing albums by Damir Imamović and Maya Youssef, with his championing of music from Bulgaria and Albania vitally important in their reputation overseas.

Boyd wrote a memoir in 2006, *White Bicycles: Making Music in the 1960s*, which covered his entry into music and his various dalliances into folk and psychedelic rock in the 60s. Excitingly, he will be releasing a follow-up in 2024 that will cover his interest in world music, and how music from around the world has had an impact on Western popular music. He tells us that the book is about his stories and "the back stories" of world music, adding: "you realise this phenomenon of the West's fascination with music from over the horizon goes back a very long way. I've got a scathing review that Charles Dickens wrote about a Zulu choir in 1853. The book goes back into the origins of all the music that we've grown to love and how much interaction there's been over the years. It's a doorstop! I've been working on it for many, many years." It's true, he told us about the book back in 2013.

Expanding on his love of music from around the world, which has increasingly become the focus of his production work, he once told us: '*I think most world music fans are looking for what we've lost in our own culture – great playing or singing, a strong personality and a connectedness to a tradition.*' I don't think many could argue that he has delivered on bringing those exact qualities time and time again over the years. Thanks Joe, a worthy winner of this year's *World Pioneer*. RUSS SLATER JOHNSON



Adam Lyons

### PREVIOUS WORLD PIONEERS

**2016**: Chris Blackwell
**2017:** Francis Falceto
**2018:** Angélique Kidjo
**2019:** Nitin Sawhney
**2020:** Tony Allen & Hugh Masekela
**2021:** Omara Portuondo
**2022:** Youssou N'Dour

## *BEST NEWCOMER*
## JASDEEP SINGH DEGUN

Since being featured as a *Songlines Introducing...* artist in #155 (March 2020), Jasdeep Singh Degun has made great strides. At the time, he was launching *Arya*, his concerto for *sitar* (his primary instrument), which was commissioned and performed by Opera North and its orchestra. Three years on and he has released his debut record, *Anomaly* (Real World, 2022) and launched *Orpheus*, a classical Indian take on Monteverdi's 17th-century opera, both of which have won him deserved recognition and many awards (the Asian Achievers Award and a National Indian Arts Award are but two).

While *Anomaly* allowed him to develop a personal vision for the first time, *Orpheus* (commissioned by Opera North in collaboration with South Asian Arts UK) saw him negotiate and fuse the worlds of Eastern and Western sound, notation and culture. All the while, he has continued to tour and collaborate with a diverse range of musicians, constantly developing his sound and identity as a composer. The *Songlines Best Newcomer* award is granted to him in recognition of his new, insightful and powerful contribution to Asian and Fusion sounds, as well as his staggering vision for what music can be and do. We asked him about his journey to this point and plans going forward.

*EMMA RYCROFT*

**Congratulations Jasdeep! How do you feel?**
Brilliant. It's a really nice surprise.

***Anomaly* started something big for you. How does it feel looking back on it now?**
It really was the catalyst for everything I'm doing at the moment... I got a scholarship from Sky Arts in 2017 to make the album. It was such a prestigious thing that rather than just being about me and the *sitar* I thought, 'Let me make the most of this by identifying the good Indian classical musicians who fall under the radar...' Then in the pandemic suddenly Peter Gabriel heard the album and he said, 'Okay, let's sign him.' Then I toured while still doing a lot of stuff with Opera North: I became artist-in-residence, then I did *Orpheus*. Doing *Anomaly* meant I had the skillset to be able to then go off and do other projects, it gave me the opportunity to pursue my vision... I still look back and I'm very proud of it. I put everything into it. It took me almost four years to make.

**How did *Orpheus* come about and how did you approach it?**
At the point when I got involved in the project, it was going to be some Indian people singing and playing around the Western opera. I came in for a workshop and rehearsal and I just went, 'nope, this is not good. Reductionist, tokenistic...' I said you need to have half music which is Indian classical music, it can't be the full opera... I had to convince all my musician friends this was going to be something vastly different and I had to go to Opera North... I had to go to my teacher and South Asian Arts and say, 'look I know you had a certain vision, but please trust me with this,' and they did. It was hard, it was the hardest thing I've ever done... Luckily it was a huge success.

**Are there any plans for the near future that we can look forward to?**
At the moment I'm thinking about my next album... I've also been made a fellow of innovation at the Royal Northern College of Music and I'm working with students there.

**Final thoughts?**
I see these awards as a spotlight on all the Indian classical musicians in this country. I want to use this opportunity to say 'go and listen to British-Asian classical musicians.' *Anomaly* might be a good starting point but start digging into these other great musicians. It's got my name on the award, but for me it's very much a coup for all of us, and that fills me with pride.

## THE WINNERS

*The other winners were all announced earlier this year. To hear from all our winners, and watch exclusive performances, visit youtube.com/songlines to watch our 2023 awards ceremony.*

**BEST ARTIST**
Oumou Sangaré (for the album *Timbuktu* on World Circuit)

**BEST GROUP**
Divanhana (for the album *Zavrzlama* on CPL-Music)

**AFRICA & MIDDLE EAST**
Sona Jobarteh (for the album *Badinyaa Kumoo* on African Guild Records)

**AMERICAS**
Le Vent Du Nord (for the album *20 Printemps* on La Compagnie Du Nord)

**EUROPE**
Okra Playground (for the album *Itku* on Nordic Notes)

**ASIA & PACIFIC**
Sarathy Korwar (for the album *KALAK* on The Leaf Label)

**FUSION**
Abel Selaocoe (for the album *Where is Home (Hae Ke Kae)* on Warner Classics)

## *VOTING IS OPEN FOR 2024*

*Voting is now open for the public to choose the Best Artist and Best Group in our next awards from a shortlist of great albums released throughout 2023. Best of all, three lucky entrants will win a pair of tickets to WOMAD 2024 (Charlton Park, July 25-28).*

**VOTE NOW:**
songlinesmusicawards.com
The deadline for voting is midnight on January 31 2024

# Scotland's 'City of Music' tunes up for its much-loved winter festival

**A stellar line-up of multi-genre talent gears up to gather in Glasgow for Celtic Connections 2024**

Kinnaris Quintet

Glasgow's internationally-renowned winter music festival, Celtic Connections, makes its highly anticipated return to the city early in the new year.

Much-loved by musicians worldwide and audiences from near and far, the annual event's 31st edition takes place from 18 January to 4 February. With more than 300 shows due to be staged, the 2024 festival's exciting, eclectic and packed programme features an outstanding line-up of global talent, and some very special and unique performances.

Since its humble beginnings back in 1994 – when just over 60 gigs celebrating traditional Scottish music attracted 27,000 folk fans to a single concert hall for the inaugural festival – Celtic Connections has grown significantly in scale. Delivered by Glasgow Life, the 2024 festival will be hosted at 25 venues throughout the city – including Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, Old Fruitmarket, The Barony Hall, Saint Luke's and iconic Barrowland Ballroom. They anticipate welcoming 110,000 attendees to performances ranging from intimate gigs to spectacular large-scale show.s.

The range of music genres which Celtic Connections spans has broadened and diversified considerably too through its three-decade history. Known as the world's largest winter music festival of its kind, and Europe's premier celebration of folk, roots and world music, it in fact has a much wider, more expansive offering than those descriptions suggest. Designed to appeal to a wide range of musical tastes, the ambitious 2024 programme also incorporates Americana, bluegrass, indie, jazz, blues, soul, rock, acoustic, traditional, experimental and orchestral music.

The festival has built up an envied reputation for showcasing a stellar line-up of both established and emerging talent, and the fact that Celtic Connections attracts such a high calibre of artists and acts is testament to how well-regarded it is by musicians worldwide. It also reflects Glasgow's global status as a UNESCO City of Music.

In what is arguably the festival's strongest-ever international line-up, the 2024 festival will see musicians descending on Glasgow from almost every corner of the globe, bringing together talent from an extensive range of countries and cultures.

In addition to homegrown talent from Scotland, Ireland and the UK, the programme features a wealth of worldwide performers from as far afield as North America, West Africa, India, Australia, Ukraine, Norway, Sweden and France.

The diverse range of international talent being showcased includes one of the greatest artists in world music today – four-time Grammy Award winner, Angélique Kidjo – as well as Breton harp legend Alan Stivell, award-winning Kyiv quartet DakhaBrakha, and Citadels of the Sun – a unique collaboration of Irish and Rajasthani musicians presented in tandem with Jodhpur RIFF.

Audiences can also look forward to acclaimed global musicians including Carlos Núñez, Fatoumata Diawara, Xabier Díaz, Jembaa Groove, Les Amazones d'Afrique, Blue Giant Orkestar, Aysay and Celtic Odyssée – a star-studded show bringing together renowned

Dougie Maclean

Blue Giant Orkestar

Fatoumata Diawara

Angélique Kidjo

artists from the eight European Celtic nations. Many shows offer an exciting combination of international talent, with another highlight seeing one of Québec's leading traditional trios Genticorum sharing the bill with Caribbean steel pannist Jonathan Scales.

From the States, the wealth of leading acts includes bassist and composer Edgar Meyer, country royalty Carlene Carter, 15-time Grammy Award winner and banjo virtuoso Béla Fleck, and virtuoso pianist and singer-songwriter Bruce Hornsby. The stellar American line-up also includes Sarah Jarosz, The Milk Carton Kids, Tommy Emmanuel, Darlingside, Tim O'Brien, Dustbowl Revival, Lambchop, Margo Price and Alison Brown, with Teddy Thompson also performing a set of songs from Nashville's golden era.

Showcase Scotland – a part of Celtic Connections which facilitates international collaboration – will be partnering with Norway for the 2024 festival to shine the spotlight on Scandinavian talent.

Scottish talent will be represented in full force by a 'who's who' of acclaimed artists including Eddi Reader, Dougie Maclean, Karine Polwart, Julie Fowlis, Rachel Sermanni, King Creosote, Paul Buchanan of The Blue Nile, Biffy Clyro's Simon Neil, Del Amitri's Justin Currie, Camera Obscura's Tracyanne Campbell, and Idlewild's Roddy Woomble. The festival also features rising stars such as Becky Sikasa, Nati, Raveloe, Ali Levack and Rosie H Sullivan.

Celtic Connections New Voices strand, which enables emerging Scottish artists to embark on new commissions, will also champion young talent by featuring musicians including cellist Alice Allen, fiddler Charlie Grey and Ali Levack – 2020 winner of BBC Radio Scotland Young Traditional Musician of the Year.

Traditional and contemporary Scottish bands are represented strongly too in the festival's 2024 programme, which features Skerryvore, Skipinnish, Rura, Talisk, Blazin' Fiddles, Kinnaris Quintet, Fara, Dàimh, Lau, Heisk, Valtos, Ross Ainslie & Ali Hutton, The Maxwell Quartet and many more.

In addition, Scotland's most celebrated national ensembles – the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the Scottish Ensemble and BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra – will appear at Celtic Connections. The latter is playing in the festival's spectacular opening concert which will raise the curtain on the 18 day-celebration of music with maximum impact. The event sees the staging of the European premiere of *ATTENTION!*, the new symphonic work from American Grammy-winning Chris Thile.

A strong contingent of talent from Ireland is always a feature of Celtic Connections, and for 2024 this will be headed up by seminal ensemble, The Bothy Band. One of the most influential and revered of the groups who revolutionised the playing of traditional music in recent generations, its members have not played a major live show together in more than 40 years.

The Irish acts appearing also include John Francis Flynn, Junior Brother, Lankum, the olllam and Altan with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

Other festival highlights demonstrating the diversity of the programme include a Mardi Gras night featuring French ensemble Beauxmont, a jazz night featuring modern funk exponent Federation of Disco Pimp, and a centenary concert commemorating Scottish socialist John MacLean, which will see a talented line-up including Billy Bragg and Siobhan Miller shining a light on the significance of the Red Clydeside era through music, poetry and reflections on MacLean's life and legacy.

In addition, unmissable nights of entertainment are guaranteed by festival favourite Roddy Hart's ever-popular Roaming Roots Revue, and Scotland's Bard will be toasted in sensational style at the Celtic Connections Burns Supper, which will feature acclaimed exponents of Burns song, Fiona Hunter and Sean Gray, among others, while other programme favourites like Transatlantic Sessions make a welcome return.

Celtic Connections festival-goers can also expect the usual mix of workshops, dementia-friendly concerts, late night sessions and pop-up performances at the Festival Club, as well as a thriving education programme that will benefit thousands of children and young people. ◆

Margo Price

**The full Celtic Connections 2024 programme can be viewed, and tickets can be purchased at www.celticconnections.com.**

Words by Ellen Drummond; Photos by Gaelle Beri, Pauline Keightley, Fabrice Mabillot, Allan Ferguson, Shelby Duncan, Alysse Gafkjen

TAKE NOTE

# Julieta Laso

The Argentine actress-turned-musician folds Latin American folklore into a new "miracle" album. "I wanted to jump to something different," she tells ***Silvia Rothlisberger***

Julieta Laso is one of the best-known contemporary tango singers in Argentina. Yet, her fifth studio album, *Pata de Perra*, sees her exploring a new path in music, moving away from tango into Latin American folklore. On the album she reimagines classic songs from Argentina, Chile, Colombia and France with arrangements guided by producer Aldo 'Macha' Asenjo, mastermind behind Chico Trujillo and Bloque Depresivo, two bands that have revamped *cumbia* and *bolero*, respectively, for new, young and international audiences. "There's no other album of mine that sounds like *Pata de Perra* and that's why I asked Macha to be the producer as I needed a guide that would take me through different paths in this journey away from tango and into a new sound, more Latin American," says Laso from her home in Salta, Argentina where she lives with her partner, the filmmaker Lucrecia Martel.

Before being a singer, Laso trained and worked as an actor; at age 22 she was performing in a play where she had to sing during the final scene. Uruguayan musician and composer Alejandro Balbis was there and instantly saw her potential as a singer. "Balbis said to me 'Negra, you have to sing!' At that point I was a little beaten up as my acting career hadn't taken off the way I was expecting," she says. Her singing career, on the other hand, took off rapidly. "I wouldn't have started singing any other thing but tango, as I'm from Buenos Aires and tango is my folklore and also because of the timbre of my voice," she continues. She recorded her first studio album *Tango Rante* in 2010, a collection of tango and *milonga* classics. Then she joined Orquesta Típica Fernández Fierro, an important *nuevo tango* orchestra in Argentina. "My reality changed and I started to travel around the world singing tango." In 2018 she released her second solo album, *Martingala*, and was nominated for the Gardel Awards for Best Female Tango Singer. Her third album *La Caldera* was released in 2021, followed by *Cabeza Negra*, which netted her two Gardel Awards, including Best Tango Album, in 2023.

For her fifth studio album, Laso decided to explore the wider folklore of Latin America. When she was 18 years old, she travelled extensively around Colombia, visiting San Basilio de Palenque, "known as the Colombian Africa," where she stayed for a spell studying cumbia and *bullerengue*. She also mentions Peruvian folklore as an important reference, through musicians and composers like Victoria Santa Cruz, Eva Ayllón and Arturo 'Zambo Cavero' Velásquez. "This is the first time that I explore these genres through my music, but in my intimate life and in my home these are genres I live with permanently," Laso says. "My previous album was the most tragic and dark I'd ever done. With this new album, I wanted to jump to something different and I love that it is the most danceable I've ever done."

Two years in the making, *Pata de Perra* suffered logistical difficulties. The pandemic meant the musicians were scattered all over Latin America and Laso says it was "miraculous" that they were able to finish the album, for while Laso was in Argentina, Macha and many of the musicians were based in Chile. This included Claudio 'Pajarito' Araya, a legend in Chile who played with Los Jaivas. The album also features Cuban rapper La Dame Blanche and Vicentico, singer of influential Buenos Aires ska band Los Fabulosos Cadillacs. "It was a dream come true and a privilege to work with Vicentico in this song ['El Mago y la Publicidad']. For a person of my generation his music and Los Fabulosos Cadillacs are a big influence. He's my idol," gushes Laso.

The album includes songs by Argentina's Atahualpa Yupanqui ('Guitarra Dímelo Tú'), and Chileans Raúl Córdova Reyes ('Olvidarte Nunca') and Violeta Parra ('Ausencia'). "Violeta Parra is one of my biggest references since I was a child," says Laso. She also tells me that the album's title *Pata de Perra* (Bitch's Paw) is an expression used in Spanish for a person who is always wandering, always restless, and always ready for an adventure – just like Laso. ◆

**+ ALBUM** *Pata de Perra is reviewed this issue, see p49*
**+ LISTEN** *'Que Me Quemen Tus Ojos (feat Macha y el Bloque Depresivo)' appears on this issue's covermount CD, track 11*

Ale López

# Bounaly

***Oli Warwick*** talks to the Malian guitarist keeping the music of the displaced alive across Bamako, infusing desert blues with *takamba*'s pulse and harmonics

*Dimanche á Bamako*, Bounaly's debut album, was recorded live at a wedding in a suburb of Mali's capital. Listen to the album, and you're instantly transported there. "There were a lot of people at the party," recounts Ali 'Bounaly' Traore. "It was extremely hot and everyone was really, really happy."

Joyous chatter fills the space between the music, which is roundly defined by Traore's buoyant guitar and filled out by Alousseyni Maïga and Abdoulaye Touré on vocals, Mahamadoun Samba on drums and Ibrahim Cissé on calabash. The celebratory mood at the event is representative of the community festivities which take place on Sundays around Bamako, but behind the cheer lies a history of repression and displacement. Traore's scratchy desert guitar sound isn't rooted in Bamako, but in northern Mali where he grew up. When jihadists took over the region in 2012, he and his community fled south and now these Sunday gatherings represent an essential cultural expression for a diaspora spread across Bamako.

"The importance of these events is that since 2012 it's impossible to play and make music in the north because it was banned by the jihadists," explains Traore. "Everyone moved to Bamako and they would call us up to play our music. That way, they still feel like they're in the north."

The biggest influence on Traore's sound is that of Mali's legendary desert blues pioneer Ali Farka Touré, who like Traore, grew up in Niafunké. Ali's huge legacy loomed large in the town, but Traore isn't directly mimicking the work of Niafunké's most famous son. "I learned to play guitar from him," he admits, "but I take a different route in my approach."

Equally important to Traore's music is *takamba*, the traditional music and dance of the Songhai and Touareg people of Niger and Mali. "Oumar Konaté and Baba Salah inspire me a lot," he says, "but I'm even more influenced by the traditional takamba from the north played on *ngoni*, which I'm trying to transcribe for guitar."

The result is an infectious, upbeat variation on the desert blues tradition, captured in its raw essence on *Dimanche á Bamako*. Releasing this album seems a logical next step for Sahel Sounds after the label featured a Bounaly track on their *Music from Saharan WhatsApp* compilation, helping introduce Traore's music to the wider world alongside widely shared videos of his wedding performances on social media. But Traore does not limit himself to playing weddings in Mali — when we speak, he's in the studio in the Netherlands working on a project with Dutch guitarist Joep Pelt. Equally, he sees his most popular music as reaching beyond the neighbourhoods of Bamako.

"Of course I am keeping this music alive for all the displaced people who love it," he says, "but this music is not just beloved by people from the north. People in Bamako love this music as well because it's universal. I keep this music alive for my community, for my people and for the world." ◆

+ **ALBUM** *Dimanche á Bamako is reviewed this issue, see p44*
+ **LISTEN** *'Ma Cherie' is on this issue's covermount CD, track 13*

**WIN**
We have three *Dimanche á Bamako* LPs to give away. To enter, answer: Where did Ali 'Bounaly' Traore grow up?
See p24 for competition rules

Courtesy of Bounaly

# SPOTLIGHT

# Yann and Emilie Tiersen

## The Breton musical couple have taken to touring their music by boat. Their aim? To "prioritise active listening and interaction with our audiences, friends and nature," they tell ***Pierre Cuny***

As countries everywhere begin giving precedence to carbon-reduction practices, more and more artists and members of the music industry internationally are embracing actions which touch on some of the most pressing environmental issues. The Conservation Music team in Southern Africa conveys in its songs messages of reforestation throughout the region, folk band Filkin's Drift this summer toured 870 miles by foot carrying their instruments along the Welsh coastal path. Then we see Coldplay using energy-generated kinetic dance floors and solar panels in giant stadiums, as well as planting millions of trees (one representing each ticket sold on their *Music of the Spheres* tour). Others with wind in their sails have taken to the sea, such as Yann and Emilie Tiersen, who this summer set out on their boat, Ninnog, for a *Celtic Circuitry and Faroe Frequencies* tour.

One of the most popular Breton musicians worldwide, multi-instrumentalist and producer Yann Tiersen has a reputation as a pianist and electronic mastermind, his music having been used for soundtracking major films. His wife, Emilie, a talented musician and songwriter in her own right, performs under her maiden name, Quinquis. Talking to *Songlines* from their home on the remote island of Ushant – situated on the farthest tip of Brittany – the couple explain their decision to live in natural surroundings and their reason for deciding to tour by sea. "After a gruelling journey across the US last year, with a hugely expensive and polluting tour bus moving from town to town, we hardly met any of the people who invited us," expresses Yann Tiersen. "We thought this way of being on the road was terribly wrong and did not want to do

it ever again. It was definitely the past." Both had already started to think about alternative ways of getting around, with an initial adventure by bicycle in 2014, where they clocked up 1,000km in six days of record shop events across Brittany and another a year later again along the northern coast of Norway.

"Living on an island I believe water is not an obstacle," Tiersen continues, "on the contrary, it is a way of connecting to people. It was therefore evident for us that the most obvious direction for our music tours was by sea." Having previously acquired Ninnog, Tiersen and Quinquis started learning to navigate. "Our aims were to offer alternative ways of thinking around established methods of touring. We wanted to reduce fossil fuel, but also prioritise active listening and interaction with our audiences, friends and nature while at the same time rebuilding a link with Celtic cultures," relates Quinquis. "Ninnog plays a vital role in our quest. We see her as the perfect vector to bond with local communities with whom we share a love of our ancestors' languages. Yann and I felt motivated to learn Breton which had been lost during the francisation of Brittany," she adds. It is interesting to note that Quinquis sings entirely in Breton on her recent album, *Seim*.

Together with their six-year-old son and two experienced skippers, they set sail in June. "The idea was to perform in various configurations according to venues," explains Tiersen. "Taking into account the small space on board, our gear was considerably reduced. We used a more compact electronic kit for our main gigs. Then guitar, violin, vocals and perhaps a local piano were sufficient for our acoustic acts. Sometimes the piano was not in tune and we laughed about it. Actually, using an untuned piano can be fun, it is part of the thing!" he says good-humouredly.

Setting off from Brest, where the couple both spent their childhoods, their expedition was to take three months. Navigating up the east coast of Ireland where concerts had been planned in major cities, Ninnog sailed on to the Faroe Islands where the Tiersens had specifically prearranged to participate in the G! music festival, held in this breathtaking landscape. "It was a long four-day crossing from Ireland to the Faroes with each of us doing two-hour watches as it was quite cold out on deck," remembers Quinquis. "We had lots of interesting exchanges with Faroe Islanders and more specifically [heard] how they too had been fighting to officialise their own local language again," she adds. They then headed down to Scotland with gigs in Inverness and Edinburgh, followed by further concerts in Wales and Liverpool, before returning home to Brittany. "Our main challenge in view of tides and adverse weather was to be able to honour our bigger shows, which was part of the adventure," Tiersen recounts. "It could be quite tiring, as sometimes we finished a gig at 3am and at seven we had to catch the next tide." All along the way, people were invited to propose smaller more intimate venues which could be in gardens, pubs, churches or community centres, sometimes almost kitchen sessions. "Having interaction with audiences after the gigs was exactly what we were looking for, spending time at the bar, sharing and enjoying time with them." One day after a concert in Cork, Quinquis was asked to gig in Kells, north-east of Dublin. It was part of a festival being held the following week. "I decided to go, so Ninnog and the crew just had to wait for me," she laughs.

**"After a gruelling journey last year with a hugely expensive and polluting tour bus… We thought this way of being on the road was terribly wrong"**

Back home to Ushant at the end of summer, the family returned to their island routine where they are very active in the local community, Quinquis being one of the municipal councillors. A few years ago they acquired a ruin which had been a dance hall and set about creating a cultural and musical space with state-of-the-art recording studios and a 200-seat concert hall. From the start the Tiersens planned for it to be open to all the inhabitants as a form of community centre with diverse activities and workshops. Naturally, Breton language lessons are taught there. L'Eskal opened in December 2018 and is now pulsating with sound. It is here that the Tiersens' latest releases are nurtured, deeply inspired by nature and the island's scenery.

In her songs, Quinquis explores the intimate stories and myths of Brittany with an exquisite approach carried by her tender and clear voice. She recorded her latest album with British sound wizard, Gareth Jones, producing ethereal and subtle electronics. Jones is a regular visitor to the family in Ushant and every year spends at least a month with them. He has worked on several of Tiersen's records, including *Kerber*, his most recent opus – which is now available as *Kerber Complete*, featuring four different interpretations of *Kerber*. Tiersen is now very much immersed in modular synthesis and vintage synthesizer sounds and textures connected to Ushant's wilderness. He still uses piano and violin, only more discretely. It seems a long way from the time when he was using a wide range of instruments and captivating melodies, making a name for himself when his music was used in the hugely successful film, *Amélie* (he does not like to talk about the movie, as wary of the limelight as he is of big cities). For both Tiersen and Quinquis, life is in the open air. Ninnog is now waiting for them with their next adventure set to take them across the Atlantic. ◆

The Tiersens on board Ninnog during their summer tour in 2023

Maite Fernandez Alonso

# SIMON SAYS…

**Simon Broughton** sees the premiere performance of a new theatre piece featuring Afghan singer Elaha Soroor

Elaha Soroor (left) sings while Hanan Issa (left) recites a story in *Flight of the Phoenix*

On Elaha Soroor's powerful debut album *Songs of Our Mothers* she recorded a popular song by an Afghan singer called Abe Mirza. In the late 70s, she was imprisoned for two years for singing and after her release, never sang again. "For me it was important to include this song, 'Gole Sadbarg', so I could be the continuation of Abe Mirza, whose voice was taken away," Soroor said to me when she spoke about the album.

Now Elaha Soroor (her pseudonym means Goddess of Happiness) has expanded this idea into a compact piece of theatre, a fusion of storytelling and music, which premiered at Llais Festival at the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff in October. Elaha Soroor sings and the storyteller is Hanan Issa, the first Muslim National Poet of Wales. In her words the singer becomes a metaphor for resilience: "Profound art is inspired from the darkest times of human history. Oppression is a breeding ground for resilience. These songs and stories are inspired by Abe Mirza who became an inspiration for generations of Afghan women."

The details of Abe Mirza's life are hard to pin down. She was from the persecuted Hazara minority, like Elaha, from a village in central Afghanistan. After she was widowed, Elaha says, she started singing and playing *dambura* at community events, singing from village to village. After the Soviet invasion of 1979, Afghanistan fell into civil war with the *mujahideen* fighting against the Russian invaders. Ironically it was America and the West supporting the Islamist mujahideen whose conservative values led to the imprisoning and silencing of Abe Mirza, and other female singers. The name Abe Mirza just means 'mother of Mirza'.

"When I was in Kabul," says Elaha, "I would go into the cemeteries because they were a quiet place to think. But I noticed that so often the women's names were absent. They were called Wife of X, Mother of Y, Daughter of Z. Everything was related to men and the women's names were missing. This is why Abe Mirza is so important to me."

The theatre piece is called *Flight of the Phoenix*, representing rebirth out of adversity while the performers are dressed in white, so it's a universal story rather than an Afghan one. "Don't mistake this for a far-away folk tale, my story repeats itself across borders," says the storyteller. The story of Mahsa Amini, 22, who died in custody for not following the dress code in neighbouring Iran is an obvious example.

Alongside Elaha and the storyteller is the three-strong female Oasis One World Choir, Josh Middleton on accordion (plus trumpet and harp) and Joost Hendrickx on drums. Aside from 'Gole Sadbarg', the Abe Mirza song, the rest of the music is original by Elaha and the musicians with lyrics in Dari/Farsi. With the Taliban back in control in Afghanistan and women banned from work and education, the message is urgent.

'*She has a small wish / Flowers have fallen from the sky / The street is full of victorious women / News headline: Freedom of Kabul*' say the lyrics of one of the songs.

Elaha Soroor was also in the stage adaptation of *The Boy with Two Hearts*, which tells an immigration story remarkably similar to her own. I rather wish *Flight of the Phoenix* included more than just one song by Abe Mirza and it may well evolve, but the soul of the singer embracing and inspiring Elaha Soroor is the powerful thread at the heart of it ◆

Simon Ayre

## Next Issue…

**March 2024 (#195)**
On sale January 26

Prepare for a bumper 25th-anniversary edition, celebrating the stories and music that have made this magazine. We will hear about the first **Festival in the Desert**, **Taraf de Haidouks**' epic 2000 concert in Romania, the ultimate Afro-Latin partnership **Afrocubism**, legendary singer **Gurrumul**, the era-defining **The Gloaming**, and much more. We will speak to **Mariza** about the music that informed her life and career, give a long-overdue *Beginner's Guide* to **Justin Adams** and hear from **Syriana** as their 14-years-in-the-waiting follow-up album approaches. There will be features on **Les Amazones d'Afrique** (pictured), captivating Norwegian band **Gabba** and why 2023 was the year of **Irish folk music**.

Karen Paulina Biswell

# FEEDBACK

*Letters, shout-outs, comments, emails and everything in between*

## Get in touch – we'd love to hear from you!


**Write to:**
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### Wake up to Wales!

Dear *Songlines*,

We noticed that your British/Irish Folk round-up last issue made no mention of Welsh artists. Sadly, it's not uncommon for Welsh music to be overlooked. This stems partly from the lack of music industry infrastructure in Wales herself. There are few professional agents and managers operating here and those with influence beyond the border are rare. As a niche genre within a small scene, folk and traditional music have not historically received as much funding as other art forms in Wales. The situation is set to get worse following a recent decision by the Arts Council of Wales to remove core funding from Trac Cymru; the only organisation with a mandate to promote and develop folk music in Wales.

Wales' broader political and cultural isolation also plays its part. Long-established prejudices that view the language as dead, investment as a waste and our music as inferior means many bookers are wary of artists singing in Welsh. This is as much a problem within Wales as the rest of the UK and Ireland, where there is pressure to conform to Anglo-centric expectations of Welsh folk. Most artists singing in Welsh have been told to switch to English, or had a review bemoaning 'impenetrable' lyrics or worse. It is telling that the few Welsh artists operating in the wider UK/Irish scenes today play predominantly instrumental music.

Our exclusion is also a symptom of the general lack of diversity and inclusion in the folk scene. It's a closed shop where knowing the right people is essential for admittance. The rosters of a handful of agencies and legacy labels still dominate the lineups of prominent festivals, tours and venues. Indeed, many still have no open application process for performing artists. The scene would be much richer if a larger platform were given to the variety of cultures and languages that exist in the UK/Ireland today.

Engaging more with the Welsh scene would be a positive step forward. We encourage publications such as *Songlines* to commission more work from English and Welsh-speaking writers in Wales. Attendance at cultural events, such as the Tŷ Gwerin at the National Eisteddfod would provide an insight into the musicianship, passion and variety of Welsh music. Bookers throughout the UK and Ireland should have more faith in their audiences and make an effort to reflect these islands' diversity in their lineups. And please, for the love of Dewi Sant, no more 'Celtic' festivals without us.

Yr eiddoch yn gywir,
*Gareth Bonello, Angharad Jenkins, Jordan Price Williams, Owen Shiers*

***While we do our best to cover Welsh music, and will try and do better, you do raise one point we can instantly improve. We need more Welsh writers. If that's you, please get in touch: russ@songlines.co.uk. Yn gywir, Russ***

## AT SHORT NOTICE

**[In] every issue, @SonglinesMag documents, through its extensive network of skilled, intrepid writers and reporters, how the world expresses itself, even if that means arrest and detention. Thanks again for your splendid monthly roundups.**
*From: @worldisc*

**@IvorsAcademy [I have] my fingers crossed for @jasdeepdegun So so exciting @Opera North @PRSFoundation @PPLUK @SonglinesMag @pulseconnects**
*From: @Keranjeet*

**Thursday morning music: Gonora Sounds: *Hard Times Never Kill* on @dusttodigital one of my favourite releases of the past two years. Zimbabwean band led by blind singer/songwriter Daniel Gonora accompanied by his 9-year-old son Isaac on drums. @SonglinesMag @THEAndyKershaw**
*From: @TonyBurke2010*

## READER PROFILE

### SAMANTHA, LONDON

***HOW DID YOU FIRST DISCOVER SONGLINES?***
I was doing my masters and researching Indigenous [Brazilian] rappers... and found a great article on Kunumi MC in *Songlines*, I subscribed right away.

***WHAT'S ON YOUR STEREO?***
Brô MC's *Resistência Nativa*, Seun Kuti & Egypt 80's *Struggle Sounds*

***FAVOURITE ALBUMS?***
Marvin Gaye, *What's Going On*; anything by Sam Cooke; Jack in Water's *Strangely Gone*; Lera Lynn's *Resistor*.

***FAVOURITE NEW ARTIST?***
Kitty Liv – she is incredibly talented.

***FAVOURITE GIGS?***
BCUC at Hootenanny Brixton and T99 at What's Cookin' in Leytonstone many years ago.

***WORST LIVE EXPERIENCE?***
At one gig [with my former band]... the singer got angry and said some choice words off mic that ended up being picked up... an embarrassing situation for all.

**If you would like to be our next Reader Profile, please email us your answers and a picture to letters@songlines.co.uk**

**WIN** Bounaly's *Dimanche à Bamako* LP **21** ◆ Kate Simon's *Rebel Music: Bob Marley & Roots Reggae* **30** ◆ Raphael Rogiński *Talán* CDs **42**

COMPETITIONS Submit your entry for each competition via the website: **songlines.co.uk/competitions**. Winners will be chosen at random. Only one entry per household. No cash alternatives. If you would prefer not to be sent details of other *Songlines* products and services, or products from other carefully selected companies, please tick the relevant box on the entry form. Closing date for this issue's competitions (unless otherwise stated): Mar 15 2024

# Sara Tavares

## (1978-2023)

*Much-loved voice of Portugal and Lusophone Africa*

The singer-songwriter with Cape Verde roots passed away in Lisbon in November, aged 45, from a brain tumour.

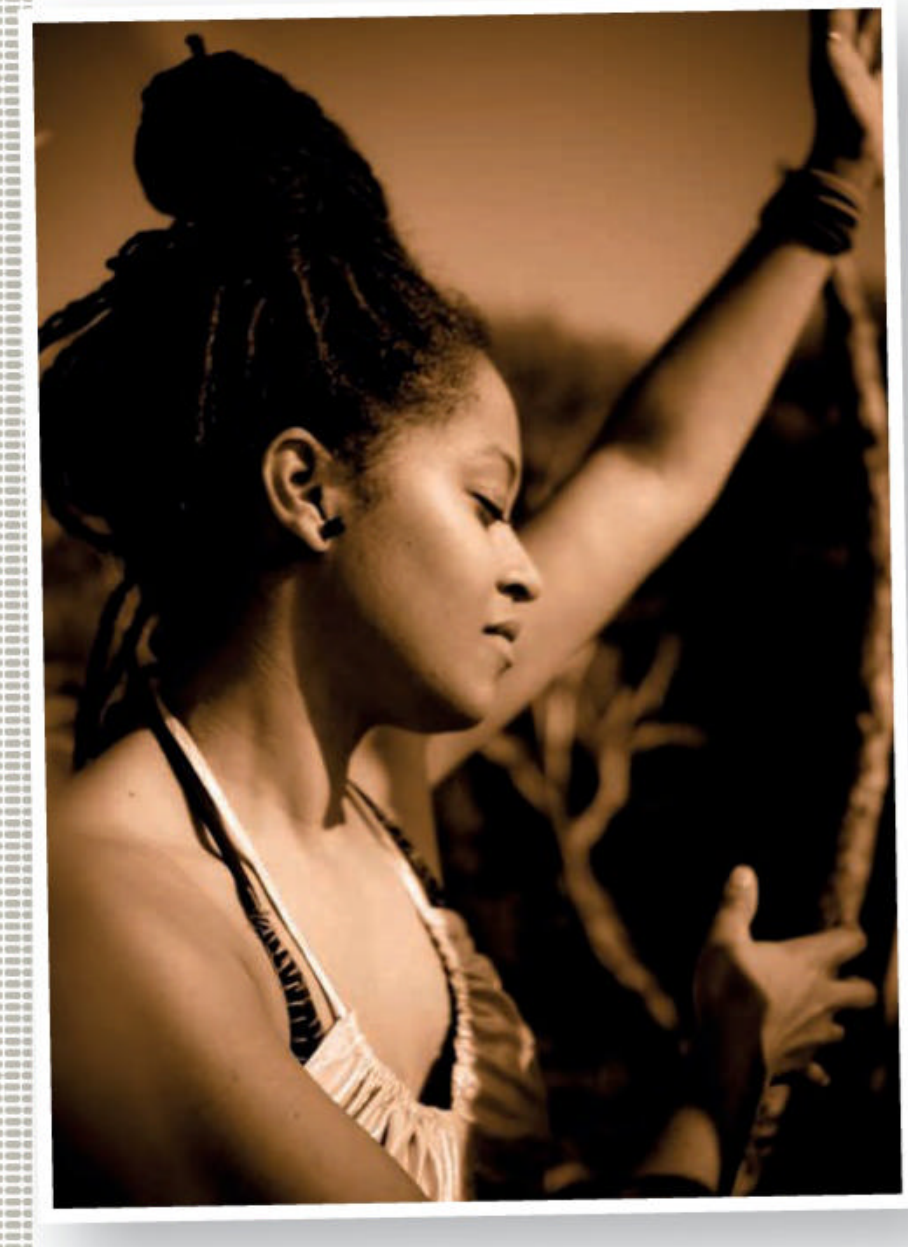
"I advised her from the beginning, when her label wanted to turn her into a pop singer. But she always preferred mixing traditional Cape Verdean music with African rhythms," says José da Silva, ambassador for Cape Verdean music since the late 80s as founder of the Lusafrica record label. Speaking from Praia, where he is recording a Christmas TV show with Elida Almeida, he adds: "[Sara] travelled with me after Cesária Évora's passing for a tribute in Santo Antão, she was curious about [Évora's] life and career, and was one of the most admired singers of the new generation, both by audiences and musicians."

Born to Cape Verdean immigrants in Lisbon in 1978, she was raised by an old Portuguese woman when her father left and her mother headed south with her younger siblings. Tavares founded the first gospel choir of the Portuguese capital, and was noticed as a teenager after winning two singing contests and representing Portugal at Eurovision, aged 16. Her version of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* track 'God Help the Outcasts' was distinguished by Disney as the best adaptation around. Her first album, *Mi Ma Bô* (1999), was produced by Congolese singer and musician Lokua Kanza.

She found international success with *Balancê* in 2005 and its jubilatory singles 'Bom Feeling' and 'One Love', full of youth and sun, smiles and grooves... and she duetted with the emerging queen-of-new-*fado* Ana Moura on the beautiful 'De Nua', the two simply backed with percussion. On 2009's *Xinti*, a songwriting masterpiece that was more introspective, she was touched by grace on sweet, sentimental and metaphysical pieces like 'Quando Dás um Pouco Mais', 'Ponto de Luz', 'Di Alma' and 'So d'Imagina'.

By the end of the century, she introduced electronic waves and rhythms to her music, while remaining at her best, incredibly soulful despite illness, on her final full album *Fitxadu* in 2017, which was nominated for a Latin Grammy. "She's joining her favourites, illustrious singers like Nina Simone, Miriam Makeba and Cesária Évora," says journalist and musician Peter Culshaw. "And of course it's sad as she had so much more to give." Tavares had released four new tracks since the end of 2022, her last goodbyes to the timeless and unforgettable, authentic work she's leaving behind. '*We're keeping your music to heal our souls*,' wrote Da Silva on social media. We very sadly agree.

*JEAN BERRY*



Ricardo Oliveira Alves

## *And farewell to...*

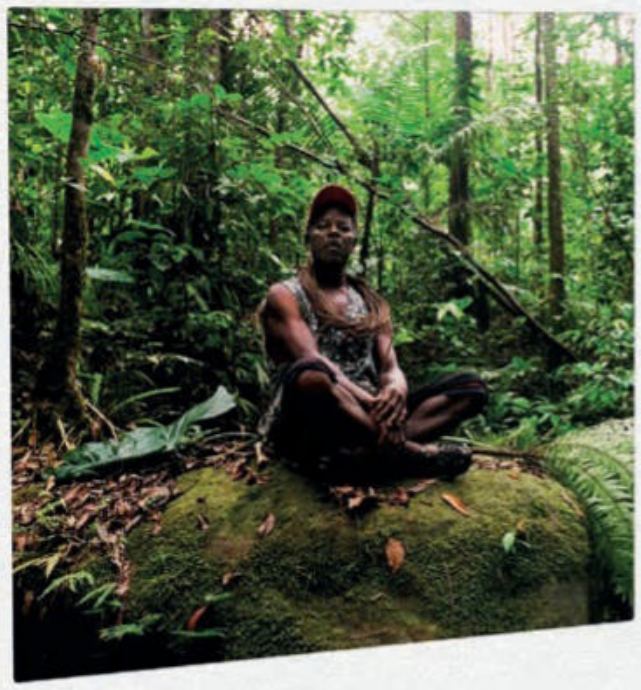
**Mohammed al Amin** (1943-2023): the Sudanese musician was known for his singing, *oud* playing and outspoken lyrics, which resulted in him seeking exile in Cairo from Sudan's military dictatorship in 1989. He returned to Sudan in 1994, and even though he kept a low profile in his home country, he found increasing worldwide notoriety, performing at festivals around the Arab world, as well as in the US and Europe... **Michael 'Ibo' Cooper** (1952-2023): Jamaican musician, arranger and producer Cooper formed Inner Circle in 1968, and later Third World in 1973. They toured with The Wailers and found success on Island Records with a fusion of reggae, soul, disco and funk, as on their 1978 hit single cover of 'Now That We've Found Love'. They have remained active to the present day.

# REAL WORLD RECORDS 2023

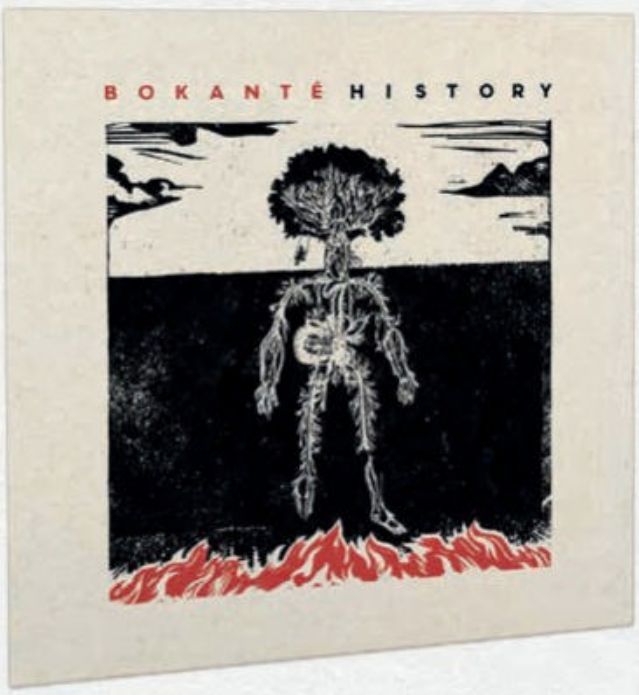
REALWORLD

## John Metcalfe
Tree

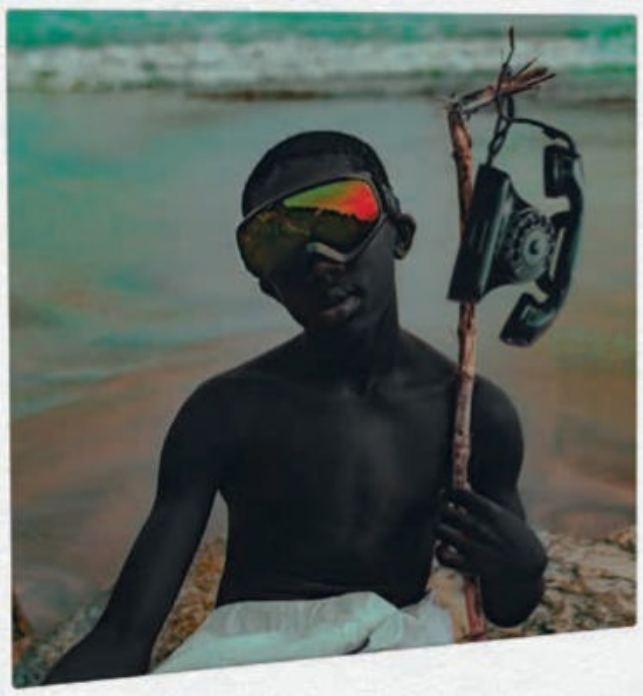
## Polobi & The Gwo Ka Masters
Abri Cyclonique



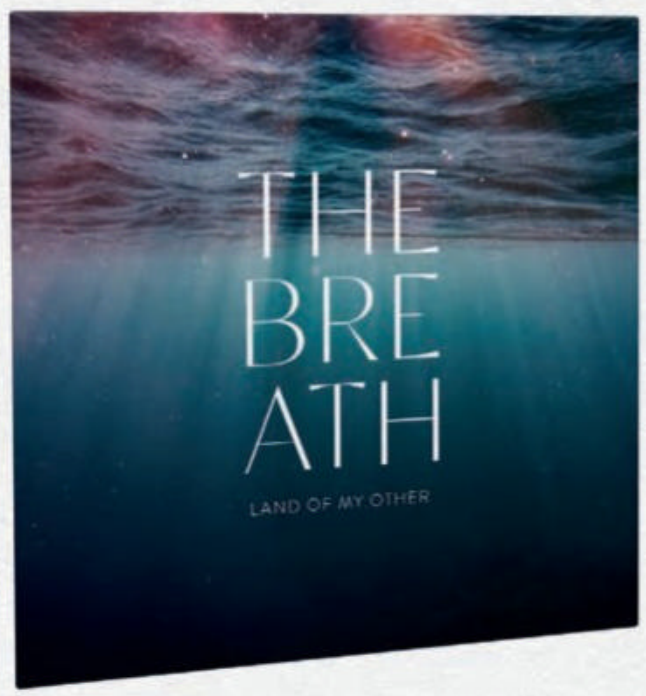
## Bokanté
History



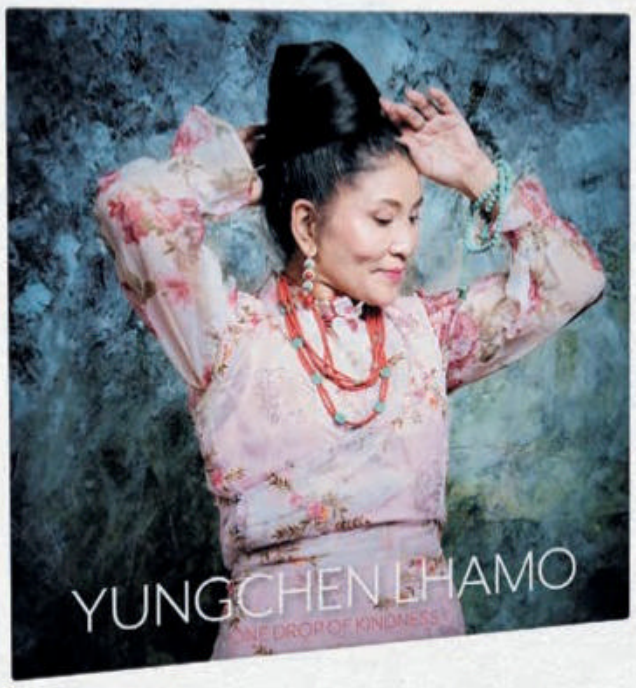

## Onipa
Off the Grid



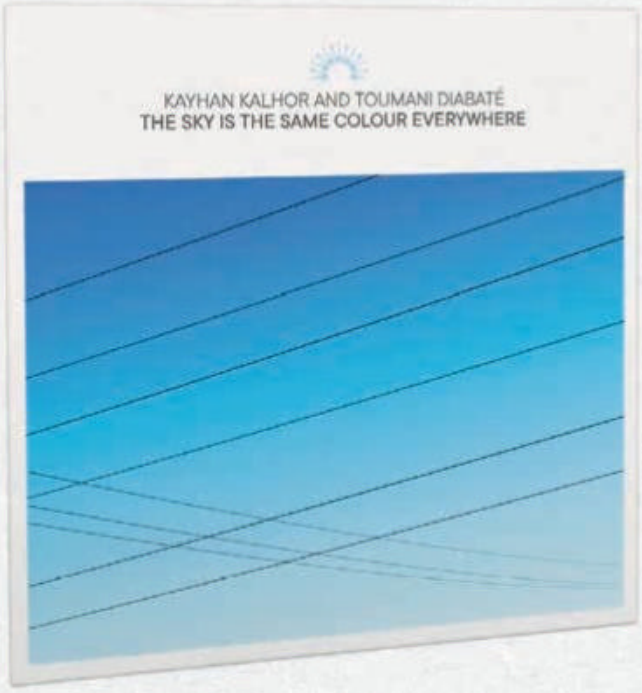
## The Breath
Land of My Other



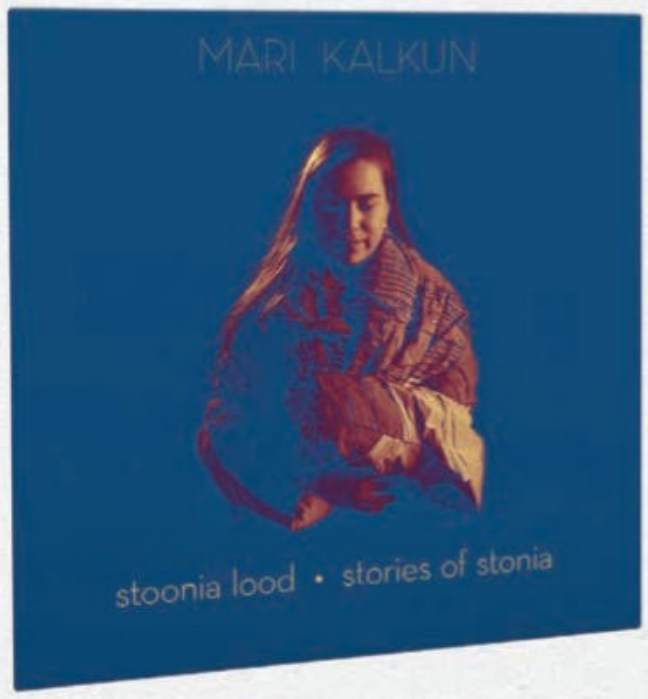

## Yungchen Lhamo
One Drop of Kindness




## Kayhan Kalhor & Toumani Diabaté
The Sky is The Same Colour Everywhere




## Mari Kalkun
Stoonia lood

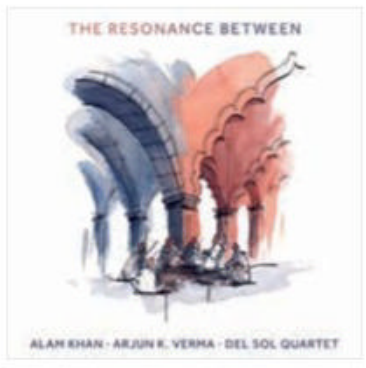



**realworldrecords.com**

# The Best Albums 2023

## Lankum
### False Lankum
(Rough Trade Records) Reviewed in #187

One of those albums where I can still vividly remember the first time I heard it, and how for the next 70 minutes I sat, eyes closed, completely transfixed as the Dubliners held me in an aural headlock. 'Go Dig My Grave' begins with just Radie Peat's piercing a capella voice. If it had remained that way it would have been a harrowing and beautiful rendition, but the way the instrumentation builds and builds, sucking the air from the room, is overwhelmingly compulsive. By the second track, 'Clear Away in the Morning' we can breathe again, but not for long as album highlights like 'Newcastle' and 'Netta Perseus' swing from beautiful melodies to claustrophobic torment. Lankum have found a winning formula where they are able to take decades-old folk songs that many of us are familiar with, but completely reinvent them. Not only that, they make them more visceral, more real, like the characters of these songs are standing at the end of our beds staring us down. As our reviewer Olivia Cheves put it at the time, this album is '*just so fucking good.*' **RSJ**




## Alam Khan, Arjun K Verma & Del Sol Quartet
### The Resonance Between
(AMMP) Reviewed in #193

This project fusing Eastern and Western sounds took six years to put together. How lucky that the musicians had the patience and vision for it. 'Awaken' opens, doing exactly as it promises, lifting your soul: the Western quartet strings gently begin a conversation with *sitar* (Verma) and *sarod* (Khan), with the *tabla* providing a glue. In 'The Passage', Del Sol hold the tension as sarod and sitar develop around each other. A driving tabla rhythm builds urgency, but then it flips, the strings become rhythmic with the tabla stuttering, before… a breath-taking halt. The understated tabla of 'Two Worlds' steals the show, surprising and delighting in turn as it strolls and then runs alongside the melody with immaculate understanding. And on 'Ascent', strings punctuate the Indian instruments as they climb ever higher, gaining and losing elements of melody and ornamentation as they go, confronting minor-key obstacles and resolving them ever quicker. A wondrous display of skill and heart. **ER**

## Sunny War
### Anarchist Gospel
(New West Records) Reviewed in #189

Sunny War had been making a name for herself with a number of limited-release albums, full of pointed, no-holds-barred lyrics that offer a verité take on life in Tennessee. The Mississippi John Hurt fingerpicking and her husky voice, often swinging round the melody *à la* Rhiannon Giddens, got people excited. *Anarchist Gospel* finally sees her take the main stage, with her strongest set of songs yet, and a supporting cast – Dave Rawlings, Jim James, Allison Russell, Chris Pierce – that take those songs to the next level. 'Shelter and Storm' is an earworm of a groove lifted by Rawlings' banjo heroics; 'Swear to Gawd' a parental stamp of authority with the chorus: '*Soon as you're 18 / I swear to Gawd / you can get out.*' Yet, it's still those songs where Sunny War and her guitar do the heavy lifting that leave the greatest impression. 'New Day' is a quietly desperate song about being addicted to love, while final tune 'Whole' is brutal in its honesty: '*Today could be the last you know / Happy's how you ought to go / No pay could ever buy your soul / Ever make you whole.*' **RSJ**

## Laliboi & Spoek Mathambo
### Siyalapha
(Teka Records) Reviewed in #190

This South African pair have already collaborated on several worthy projects. *Siyalapha* (We Are Here), however, is their best yet, with juicy arrangements (courtesy of Spoek) and delicate use of Laliboi's smooth vocals. 'Ungukumkani' opens, with synthesised ambient voices swirling beneath a deep bass rhythm and Laliboi's lilt. It's a haunting start in contrast to the following South African township melody, 'Buya Embo', with lipsmacking brass, infectious chorus and ululations that stop you in your tracks. 'Ityala Lama Wele' is poignant, with gentle hand-clapping and guitar threading in and out of the backdrop to Laliboi's delicate falsetto. And so the magic goes, with Spoek masterfully fusing the traditional and electronic, showing off his skill and knowledge of those who came before and those alongside him. The twanging bass and intimate female spoken word on 'Amakiss Amaningi'; the ethereal 'Muntu Wam (Jolajola)', moving from pinched guitar to euphoric dance track; all feed into this delightful contemporary and historic exploration that improves on each listen. **ER**

## Kayhan Kalhor & Toumani Diabaté
### The Sky is the Same Colour Everywhere
(Real World Records) Reviewed in #189

Kalhor and Diabaté first performed together in 2016 at the behest of the Morgenland Festival in Germany, where they played a 90-minute improvisation with no rehearsal, except for a short soundcheck. The Persian *kamancheh* (Kalhor) and Malian *kora* (Diabaté) are not the most obvious of partners, but the bond was instant. After that first gig, they went on a short European tour, recording this album in Paris after their last show. Why it took seven years to release the album is a moot point. We should be happy it got released at all, for it's a beautiful thing. Essentially one long, extemporised piece, it never feels repetitive. Kalhor varies how he plays the kamancheh, from bowing to energetically picking the strings. 'The Joyful Sun' is a great example: it begins with a sprawling kora melody, growing ever more turbulent as both instruments are violently plucked, Kalhor moving to bow for the razor-sharp finale. An incredible union between Africa and the Middle East, between Mande and Persia. **RSJ**

*Songlines*' editorial team, **Russ Slater Johnson** and **Emma Rycroft**, choose their favourite albums of the year. After another bumper year of releases, there really were no easy choices.

## Bala Desejo
Sim Sim Sim
(Mr Bongo) Reviewed in #189

Lifelong friends Julia Mestre, Dora Morelenbaum, Zé Ibarra and Lucas Nunas channel the Brazilian sounds of yesteryear to create a joyous and beguiling listen that would make Gal Costa herself beam. It's hard to believe that this is only their debut. Warm sounds of chatter and laughter welcome the listener, building to a startling end before 'Baile de Máscaras (Recarnaval)' sees the dual female vocals of Mestre and Morelenbaum drive us into a wonderfully smooth and breezy *tropicália*. Float away on the whole group's vocals as they chase each other around 'Lua Comanche'; indulge in the fingerpicking-and-vocal arrangements of 'Dourado Dourado' and 'Nesse Sofá', before they soar into full-band anthems; soak up the jazz (with a special nod to the bassist) and smoky vocals of 'Passarinha'; let the eerie whispers of 'Sim Sim Sim' get under your skin; and delight in the megaphone effects, funky bass and guitar riffs of 'Faixa Técnica'. Whatever you do, don't let the fun this group clearly had recording the album distract from their technical wizardry. *ER*

## Islandman feat Okay Temiz & Muhlis Berberoğlu
Direct-to-Disc Sessions
(Night Dreamer) Reviewed in #187

Turkish trio Islandman have made a name for themselves through pulsing electronic productions pushing their Turkish heritage up front, ensuring that they've become a force on the global bass scene. *Direct-to-Disc Sessions*, as the name suggests, was recorded straight to vinyl, and saw them recruit Turkish percussion legend Okay Temiz and *saz* virtuoso Muhlis Berberoğlu for a live album that revitalised their sound. Previous albums had been led by electronic beats, but what's clever here is how they allow the instruments to lead the way, electronics only coming later and amplifying what's on offer. 'KALENĪN BEDENLERĪ' saunters for five minutes as the instruments vie for attention, eventually hitting on a giddy rhythm which gallops into the distance; 'FĪDAYDA' is better, flailing licks soon turning into a deep, slow groove with saz, synths and Temiz' marvellous percussion taking turns in the spotlight. A meditative, occasionally epiphanic and always engaging release. *RSJ*

## Chief Adjuah
Bark Out Thunder Roar Out Lightning
(Ropeadope) Reviewed in #192

Chief Adjuah shines on an instrument of his own invention:,the Bow (described as a '*double-sided harp*'), in this work inspired by Afro-Indigenous and New Orleans religions and rituals. Bird, wind and water sounds create a sense of space and place, while *griot* Adjuah plucks his Bow rhythmically, his voice soaring, singing of pain with an epic sensibility. The 15-minute title-track is the main event. Adjuah's Bow runs urgently beneath his booming voice, sometimes speaking, sometimes singing. He muses on violence against Black women, and colonial violence more broadly. It's ambitious, but the tight orchestration ensures you're always captivated; and fittingly aghast. It's followed by the more sanguine 'Shallow Water' with joyful voices wrapping around each other in chorus. Percussion-led 'On to New Orleans' is a lip-biting overflow of emotions; as is the balance between three vocal melodies on 'Ashé Chief Donald'; and the chaotic 'Bark Out Thunder Roar Out Lightning (Duo)' takes the title-track to edgier, jazzier heights. *ER*

## Les Mamans du Congo & Rrobin
Ya Mizolé
(Jarring Effects) Reviewed in #192

I cannot think of another album that has brought me as much joy as this one this year. It feels like there is no shortage of albums these days that unite African or Afro-descendant vocals with electronic beats and bass, but the Congolese singers Les Mamans du Congo and their French producer Rrobin stand out from the pack. These are songs full of joyful, bouncing basslines that are never rushed; simple in their conception and always allowing plenty of space. Space which is filled by those glorious female vocals, as Gladys Samba and her backing singers dance around the beats. 'Ntima', with a skipping, 2/4 beat, is blissful, rumbling and rousing when it gets to the choir-filled chorus; 'Loango Weaver' picks up the pace with a primitive synth melody in the vein of early Aphex Twin; and 'Sala Sala' finds Samba at her most potent, breaking free amid a whirring nu-disco production. But 'Consolation' is perhaps the highlight, with *marimba*-like raindrops as Les Mamans offer up heavenly vocals, a motherlode of joy. *RSJ*

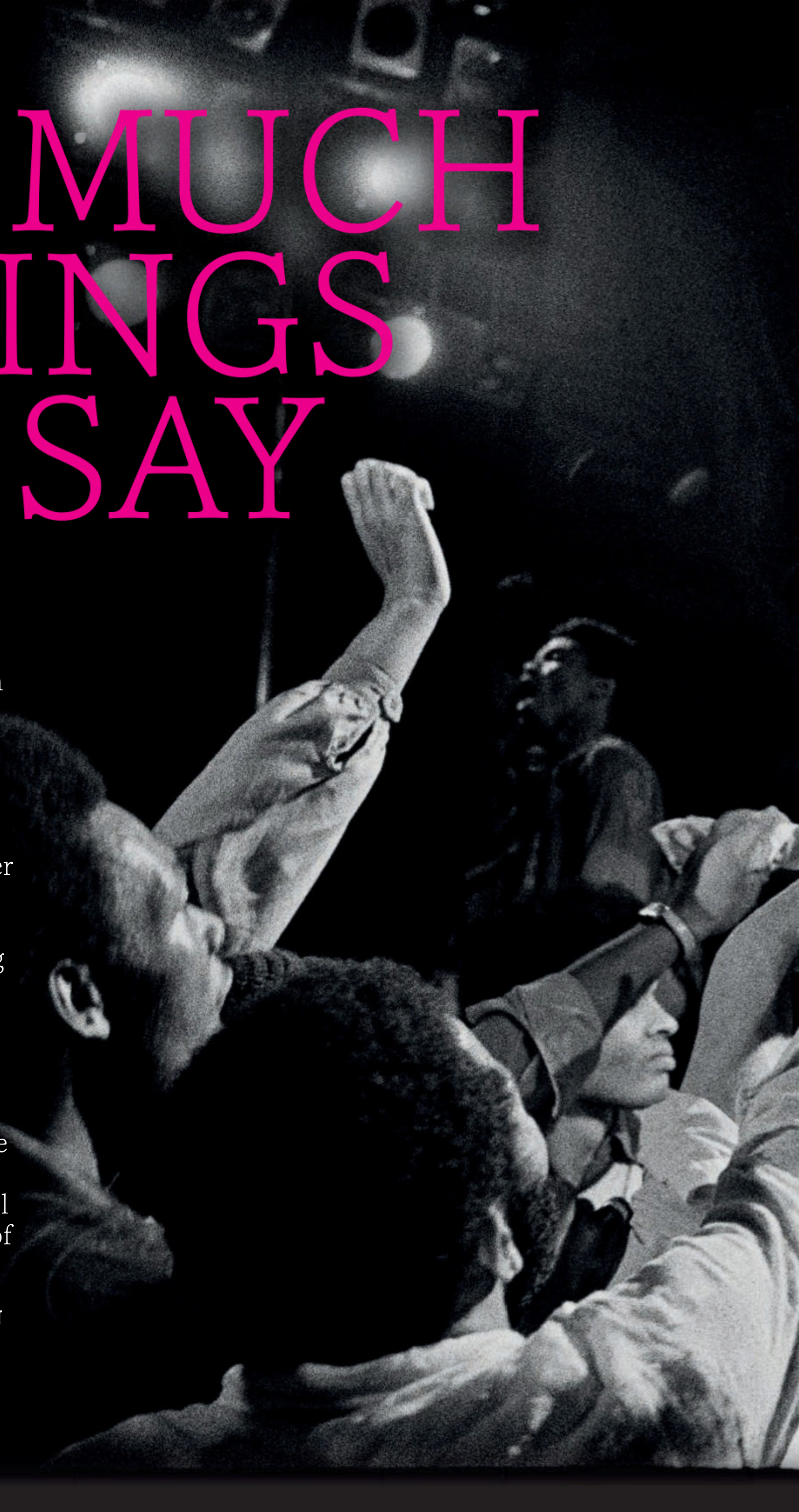
## Lisa O'Neill
All of This Is Chance
(Rough Trade Records) Reviewed in #185

This album was released a few months after O'Neill's remarkable cover of Dylan's 'All the Tired Horses' for *Peaky Blinders*, and a few years after 2018's *Heard a Long Gone Song*. Expectation was high. And then she bloody opened with a spoken-word delivery of Patrick Kavanagh's 'The Great Hunger'. This, the title-track, is brilliant, knocking the breath out of me each time. O'Neill's gruff, piercing voice delivers the poetry smoothly, her command, '*Be Easy*', hitting with force. Seven self-penned tracks that speak to her maturity and growing confidence as a creator follow. 'Silver Seed' is an enchanting, humorous celebration of womanhood and maternal legacy; 'Old Note' explores songwriting, how the notes find O'Neill rather than vice versa. Its ephemerality and lyrics speak to the impossibility of truly conveying this magical process. It's hard to choose a favourite, but the closing 'Goodnight World', a crooning lullaby listing all the things worth loving in the world, fills me with feeling at the mere mention of its name. A masterpiece. *ER*

# SO MUCH THINGS TO SAY

Ahead of a new Hollywood biopic of **Bob Marley**, we celebrate the Jamaican musician and his astonishing legacy by speaking to his family and friends. ***Clyde Macfarlane*** talks to American photographer Kate Simon who first captured Marley during his astonishing performance at London's Lyceum Theatre and was regularly by his side from then on. Plus, Bunny Wailer, Coxsone Dodd, Dave Barker and Marcia Griffiths all share their memories of Bob with ***David Katz***.

PHOTOS BY **KATE SIMON**



Marley at London's Lyceum Theatre, 1975

"The other day I was in a hardware store in upstate New York," says the American music photographer Kate Simon. "A woman came out of the lighting section with my photo on her shirt." Such is the potential daily life of anyone with a camera who spent time with Bob Marley. "If you couldn't find a great photograph you were blind."

The image in question is the frequently reproduced cover of Marley & The Wailers' 1978 *Kaya* album, a photo that also covers Kate Simon's new book, *Rebel Music: Bob Marley and Roots Reggae*, a selection of photos that stretch from her first meeting with Marley at his breakthrough London Lyceum gig to her coverage of his funeral. Along the way we meet pretty much all the big hitters in 70s roots reggae: Toots Hibbert, The I-Three, Peter Tosh strutting like a peacock, Bunny Wailer scowling uncooperatively at Simon's refusal to wear a skirt, King Tubby looking self-conscious in a paper crown while Jacob Miller chats on a dial-phone, a string hammock stretched to contain his bulk.

I'm interviewing Simon via a Zoom call that begins with "do I click this now?" and evolves to a nostalgia trip into her love of capturing the world of 70s reggae on her Nikon F2. "It was just a completely unique culture that was really ripe for photographing," she says fondly. Her favourite Bob Marley album? Not *Catch a Fire*, *Burnin'* or *Natty Dread*, all of which "led up to the pinnacle" that is *Exodus*, but rather Marley's spiritual-heavy final offering, *Uprising*. A fond memory ▸

## Bunny Wailer

*Stepbrother and co-founder of the Wailers*

"Bob could be like more than a brother in the sense that I looked up to Bob for a lot of good reasons. I was a little city youth, accustomed to those things that are of the city, so when I went to the countryside to live [when Marley's mother married Bunny's father], it was a totally different environment with horses, donkeys, cows, pigs, goats and no electricity, no kind of civilisation or machinery or anything; everybody had to be doing things based on their own abilities and Bob as an 11-year-old had so many responsibilities, so that brought a lot of admiration from me. He had uncles who were more like adults, but somehow his grandfather trusted him to carry out those duties that his uncles should be carrying out, and I realised that Bob had a kind of strength in him because he had no other choice. In those times, for a youth to be the son of white folks and Black folks, it suggests a lot of negatives, so Bob was really never embraced in the manner that all the other children got a fatherly love and a motherly love, and that drew me closer to him, because I realised that he really needed a friend; he really needed someone to be in his corner, someone to be on his side. My dad had a shop, with access to all kinds of food and money, so I made sure that me and Bob could go and enjoy ourselves by buying cupcakes and grater cakes, going all about the place with money in our pockets. So Bob got attached to me and I got attached to him because of those reasons, of him making me know how to survive in the country, how to move the horse, how to ride the donkey, how to run down the goats and catch them, and Bob always had to be earning his meals, because that was how he was treated… When there were no entertainment or enjoyment, I would make a bamboo guitar and sing songs that I learned in Kingston, and Bob was so fascinated; with that legacy I left St Ann, only to realise that Bob took the whole affair of music so seriously that he was the one who influenced me back into music, because when he came to Kingston to live, he came with this whole new music thing, and I was going to school and getting ready to go to the university when he came to me with this music idea. He went away and he did songs for Beverley's Records like 'Judge Not', 'One Cup of Coffee' and other tracks, showing me that, 'Hey, if I can do it, you can do it too.' He didn't stop, he didn't relent from pumping the idea in me, until I decided that I would go ahead and deal with the music situation too."

## Coxsone Dodd

*Producer of The Wailers' early recordings at Studio One*

"Bob Marley, I really try to help, because it was the early days when nobody really had any money to produce artists that much – not even me. A friend of mine by the name of Seeco Patterson brought The Wailers here and I was amazed; it knocked me out, because I admired the harmony that they had. They came to me as The Juveniles and two girls was in the group, and they had that team sound, so I was crazy about them, because we had nothing like that before, coming like a Frankie Lymon kind of thing. Junior Braithwaite was singing lead, but Braithwaite had to leave to join his parents in Chicago, so then I selected Bob as the leader, and he was a hard worker too. I love him and looking back and seeing that he's become such a big star, I feel good to know that I'd seen that in him at a very early stage."

has her staying a few doors down from bassist Family Man Barrett, who treated her to some unreleased demos of 'Coming in from the Cold'. "I just never heard anybody's vocal phrasing the way Bob Marley sings," she says. "He has a great voice, but also the way he works each lyric is so engaging. It's so unique. His songwriting was not passive, it was about standing up for your rights, but it's also about unity and interdependence. So, he was just a really genius songwriter. His songs come one after another and they're all incredible."

When Simon first met Marley backstage after his Lyceum gig she'd photographed Ozzy Osbourne, Lynyrd Skynyrd and The Rolling Stones. Reggae was a niche genre which hadn't gained a mainstream audience, despite record producer Chris Blackwell's efforts. "Bob was just so special," she recalls. "When you meet a subject that really works with you, it's a gift. I went back to Bob so many times… I think only William Burroughs had the same draw for me."

Marley's portraits are mostly pensive, knotted brow shots that show a man with, as Simon puts it, a "deep intelligence you should never

"HIS **SONGWRITING** WAS NOT PASSIVE, IT WAS ABOUT **STANDING UP** FOR YOUR RIGHTS, BUT IT'S ALSO ABOUT **UNITY** AND **INTERDEPENDENCE**"

Bob covering his eyes during a performance on the *Exodus* tour

From left to right: Simon's favourite photo of Bob; Marley at the *One Love Peace Concert* in 1978 joining the hands of Jamaican political rivals Michael Manley and Edward Seaga; Bob with Simon in 1977 during the *Exodus* tour

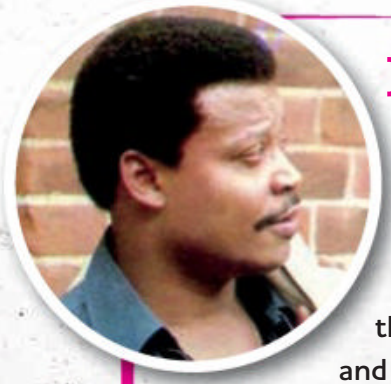
underestimate. There's a Buddhist saying that comes to mind when I remember Bob: 'the greatest gift you can give another person is the gift of non-fear.'" We see Bob on stage, hands covering his eyes and fists raised into beams of illuminated dust. "In the song 'Exodus', he would sing '*Open your eyes and look within!*' he would open his eyes wide on the word '*open*.' I would get one opportunity per night."

Backstage, Bob breaks into smiles, but just as often he is thoughtfully resting a finger against his temple, observing events and people around him. On a tour bus shot he's perched barefoot on a chair headrest, telling a joke to Seeco, his conga player, who's rolling a spliff one handed. The next shot, spliff half smoked, shows Bob still joking; Seeco is bent double in near-tears of laughter.

Simon's favourite pic shows Bob pensive and alone on the bus, hands crossed and bandaged foot propped up. "I just like that picture because it's very direct and his expression is deep. Sometimes he'd be close to Gilly [Bob's cook] and Seeco, but on buses or planes he was usually alone… he was somewhat shy." Another great shot shows Bob at passport control, the Brylcreemed officer – smart in the day, but dated against Bob's timeless looks – keeping character despite the camera. Bob has a copy of *The Daily Express* in one hand. In transit we see him reading *The Mirror*; in another shot he sits away from the band with a Bible. Behind the officer, a poster offers 700,000 Deutschmarks for 12 rebel-looking members of the Baader-Meinhof gang.

Gilly's boiled seaweed recipe features in *Rebel Music* opposite a photo of fish being wood-smoked on sheet metal. "The hotels they stayed at had to have a decent-sized kitchen so Gilly could cook 'ital' food… that was ahead of its time. So different from other rock musicians and their on-the-road lifestyles. I felt very respected by Bob. People regard him as being some kind of sexual lion because of all of his children but I didn't really pick that up." It's the pensive Bob, not the joking one, who we see signing autographs for teenagers in Stockholm.

Kate Simon's second meeting with Bob took place during a press visit to Jamaica to cover Bunny Wailer's *Blackheart Man* album (1976). After racing Chris Blackwell in the hotel pool, Simon, still in her bathing suit, had a chance meeting with Bob among one of the hotel's many big-name guests. It was Bob, not Mick Jagger, Lee 'Scratch' Perry or Joni Mitchell who used up two and a half reels of film. One of the shots was the *Kaya* photo; "Bob's face is so open, his smile is so big, his gaze so sharp that the photograph almost seems to give off light," she muses. Two years after the impromptu poolside photoshoot, the image got the ultimate compliment – Simon snapped Bob wearing a *Kaya* T-shirt at the politically heated *One*



## Dave Barker

***Half of Dave & Ansel Collins, Barker was close to The Wailers when both were recording for Lee 'Scratch' Perry***

"Myself and Glen Brown appeared on stage at the Carib theatre with The Vikings; Bob Marley was on the same bill and I was surprised how the people responded to Bob Marley then, because Bob came out with a Rastafarian song, which also had something to do with the festive time, but how the people responded to Bob was quite strange, because they laughed at Bob on stage, which to me, didn't feel right. You see how things work? Right now, the ones who laughed isn't laughing anymore. Then I was in Randy's studio one night, when Bob was recording a tune; really, at that time, he just get a whole heap of fight, so he turn around and say, 'Boy, make them fight me, because the time going come when a man get tired fi see my face. The whole of them going to have my music as placard 'pon them wall. My music is going to spread to every corner of this earth.' So said, so done."

Trojan Records: Soul Jazz Records

# TOMMY EMMANUEL CGP

10/01/24 EXETER CORN EXCHANGE
11/01/24 BATH FORUM
12/01/24 LONDON CADOGAN HALL
13/01/24 BEXHILL DE LA WARR PAVILION
14/01/24 SOUTHEND PALACE THEATRE
16/01/24 BURY ST EDMUNDS APEX
17/01/24 LYTHAM LOWTHER PAVILION
18/01/24 SUNDERLAND FIRE STATION
19/01/24 GLASGOW CELTIC CONNECTIONS
21/01/24 BUXTON OPERA HOUSE
23/01/24 KINGS LYNN CORN EXCHANGE
24/01/24 SHREWSBURY THEATRE SEVERN
25/01/24 ST ALBANS ARENA
26/01/24 NEW BRIGHTON FLORAL PAVILION
27/01/24 HARROGATE ROYAL HALL

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# HUGH CORNWELL

## JANUARY 2024

17 BURY ST EDMUNDS THE APEX
18 NEWCASTLE BOILER SHOP
19 GLASGOW QMU
20 HOLMFIRTH PICTUREDROME
24 BRIGHTON CONCORDE
25 ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL
26 LEAMINGTON ASSEMBLY
27 FROME CHEESE & GRAIN

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SAT 30TH LONDON 100 CLUB
SUN 31ST NEWCASTLE THE CLUNY

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FEATURING *THE RED HOT CHILLI DANCERS*

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HARROGATE ROYAL HALL | MAY 25 2024
LONDON CADOGAN HALL | MAY 26 2024
BUXTON OPERA HOUSE | JUNE 06 2024
CARDIFF TRAMSHED | JUNE 07 2024
BLACKPOOL GRAND THEATRE | JUNE 08 2024
JUNE 13 2024 | BURY ST EDMUNDS THE APEX
JUNE 14 2024 | ST ALBANS ALBAN ARENA
JUNE 15 2024 | CHESTER STORY HOUSE
JUNE 20 2024 | PETERBOROUGH THE CRESSET
JUNE 21 2024 | BIRMINGHAM TOWN HALL
JUNE 22 2024 | CHELTENHAM TOWN HALL

CODY PENNINGTON
# COUNTRY SHOW

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05.07 **LEEDS** UNIVERSITY STYLUS
06.07 **LIVERPOOL** O2 ACADEMY
12.07 **HOLMFIRTH** PICTUREDROME
13.07 **BRIGHTON** CHALK
19.07 **NORWICH** WATERFRONT
20.07 **NORTHAMPTON** ROADMENDER
25.07 **CHESTER** LIVE ROOMS
26.07 **CHESTER** LIVE ROOMS
27.07 **NOTTINGHAM** ROCK CITY

## Marcia Griffiths

***Member of The I-Three, Marley's backing singers during the Island years***

"One of the greatest things that has happened to me was when I met Bob Marley, and when I was privileged to share those special moments working with him. He taught me so many things, because his music was his whole life; nothing came before his music, and that's when I started to realise that this is not just fun and games and moving your body and rhythm; it goes deeper than that. I realised that we are in a position where we can communicate to the world through the medium of music and that what we say to people means a lot; we can educate and we can soothe people's souls, touch souls all over the universe, which no doctor can do."

*ADDITIONAL INTERVIEWS BY DAVID KATZ*

Marcia Griffiths (right) with The I-Three

*Love Peace Concert* at the National Stadium in Kingston in 1978.

The *Kaya* image is seen often in images of Bob's 1981 funeral. Simon was sent to get an open coffin shot but found herself instead guided through the streets of Kingston by the crowds. As she interprets, the reason there is no photo of Bob Marley lying in state is due to her discretion. Instead, her final comment is her condolence gift to Rita Marley: a faceless portrait of Bob praying head down, a dreadlocked mane spilling over his shoulders and out of shot. ◆

*CLYDE MACFARLANE*

**+ READ** *Kate Simon's Rebel Music: Bob Marley and Roots Reggae is published by Genesis Publications*

**WIN**

We have 3 copies of Kate Simon's *Rebel Music* to give away. To enter, answer: Which Bob Marley album is Kate Simon's favourite?

See p25 for competition rules

# PUNKY REGGAE PICTURE SHOW

In February 2024 Marley will make his way to UK cinema screens in *Bob Marley: One Love*, a biopic of the singer directed by Reinaldo Marcus Green and starring Kingsley Ben-Adir as Bob, Lashana Lynch as Rita Marley and James Norton as Chris Blackwell. We had a chat with Green, who has previously directed *King Richard* and *Monsters and Men*, about the challenge of depicting Bob on screen and his experiences of making the film.

**WAS IT AN EASY PROCESS DECIDING TO MAKE A BIOPIC OF BOB MARLEY? WHAT RESERVATIONS DID YOU HAVE?** There's making movies, and there's making movies about Bob Marley. Those two things are very different. Different stratospheres. Bob is a legend, no doubt about it. So, there was an immense pressure on getting it right. I knew we were looking for a needle in the haystack. Fortunately for us, we found Kingsley Ben-Adir. Kingsley's audition tape had everything I needed to think that maybe the improbable was possible. What made him stand out was his presence and his interpretation of Bob. He was not trying to imitate Bob Marley; he was channeling the essence of Bob. I knew from that moment we had a fighting chance. That was the day the real work began. I'm so happy it did because Kingsley delivers a terrific and bold performance, daring, and emotionally fortuitous. The blessings of the Marley family and the people of Jamaica is all I need. With their support from the beginning, and throughout this process, it has made bringing this film to life all the more joyous, meaningful, and imperative.

**THE FILM WAS SHOT IN JAMAICA AND LONDON. WHAT WAS IT LIKE FILMING IN JAMAICA, AND WHAT DID SHOOTING THERE BRING TO THE FILM?** Fortunately for me this was my second time filming in Jamaica. I was blessed to have directed an episode of Netflix's *Top Boy* in Jamaica. It was truly a joy to return to such a beautiful country. The Jamaican film industry is filled with talent in front of and behind the camera. We were able to work with local communities and organizations and with the support of the film commission and Prime Minister, we were able to create something truly special together.

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN ABOUT MARLEY THROUGH MAKING THE FILM?** I've heard that next to Jesus Christ, Bob Marley has the second most recognizable face on the planet. Every single person I met that knew Bob said he was their best friend. People who didn't know him felt that way about him. Music was just one of his many gifts. He was able to relate to the most common man and woman, because he was one of them. Making this movie has brought me closer to Bob as a person; a father, a husband, a musician, a revolutionary. I hope people will have a deeper understanding of his lyrics, and his mission and work ethic, and feel even closer to the music they already love.

*Bob Marley: One Love is in UK cinemas from February 14, 2024*

# AUTO RENEWAL

Chilean singer **Mon Laferte** was sick of being pushed as a pin-up, so she shut herself off from the world, emerging reborn with her boldest and most experimental album to date. "I wanted to start from zero, just using a computer," she tells ***Charis McGowan***

"I don't want to empower anyone," says Mon Laferte with a shrug as she leans her right arm on the table, the tattooed spider on her neck peeking out from beneath her black leather jacket. "I just want people to reflect." *Autopoiética* is the Chilean singer-songwriter's eighth studio album since her debut in 2011 (at least as Mon Laferte, she released one as Monserrat Bustamante in 2003, after a stint performing on a Chilean talent show). Under her current moniker she has sold millions of records worldwide, earning two Grammy nominations and winning two Latin Grammys.

The records that won these plaudits – albums such as *Mon Laferte (Vol 1)* (2015), *La Trenza* (2017), *Norma* (2018) and *SEIS* (2021) – were characterised by Laferte's mastery across a spectrum of Latin genres: from piano-driven *boleros* and brassy *bachatas* to rhythmic *cumbia*-pop songs. But, even though she's navigated musical styles from folk to reggaeton, she's struggled to shake off the flower-in-her-hair pin-up image she initially rose to fame with; as an artist inherently tied to Latin pop and big vocal ballads.

On *Autopoiética*, Laferte subverts all expectations, marking a distinctive turn in her catalogue. Radically different in conception and production, it's her most experimental work to date. "I was a bit tired of instruments," she admits. "We wanted to do an album with the computer, using electronic sounds." She deliberately shunned the studio, and describes "locking" herself in her house with two friends: an engineer and a producer. Together, they set to work on something totally stripped back. "I wanted to start from zero, to recreate myself and be a new person," she explains. "More than an artist of sound, I'm an artist of speech… I like to think of myself as an actress that creates personas on each record."

The record didn't begin with an idea for the sound, rather it began with a single word: 'Autopoiesis'. Coined by Chilean biologists-cum-philosophers Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana in the 1970s, the term refers to the cellular process of renewal and re-growth. "*Poesis* is Greek for produce, and the word 'poetry' also stems from that word. So, I wanted to find poetry in the machines," Mon Laferte explains. "That's it: electronic sounds, without instruments, talking about recreation." 'Autopoiética' is a pulsating techno song that vividly evokes the rhythmic division of cellular activity, reflecting the frenzied creativity of Mon Laferte's unrestrained ambition. "Autopoiesis is creation: you are wounded and your body regenerates," she sums up.

The exploration of the concept led Laferte into sonically uncharted territories. Each song began with a bassline and some samples – she reveals that 90s UK outfits like Portishead and Aphex Twin were key inspirations. It's resulted in songs like 'Tenochtitlán', an eerily beautiful reflection on humanity, society, life and death with a trip-hop ambience. The accompanying music video shows Laferte, dressed in black among ruins, falling to the ground as a masked crowd pelts her with stones. Later she is seen naked, dragged atop a crucifix. "I wanted to make a metaphor inside the song… about social judgement. It's not about myself as a victim, but how we are as a society," she explains. "It's an invitation to think about why we punish others, why there always has to be a victim and a perpetrator."

That's why death and religion are so present on an album founded on the concept of creation. She doesn't view death as something to be feared, or negative. Rather, she cites Mexico – her home for the past 16 years – as a core influence on her afterlife beliefs; "Death here is so normalised; it's daily bread. I used to be scared of it, but now it's not important to me," she says. "Death is about renewal, and that's why it's so present." That's not to say the album is entirely philosophical. Some of the strongest moments are straightforward songs that hinge on self-belief, assertion and confidence. 'NO+SAD' is a reggaeton-tinged ride, laden with Chilean slang, where Laferte throws off insults she's received with bravado: '*flaite… funado… maraca*' – being chavvy or cancelled or slutty: '*I don't care,*' she sings, in Spanish. '*I'm not going to be sad.*'

“More than an artist of sound, I’m an artist of speech… I like to think of myself as an actress that creates personas on each record”

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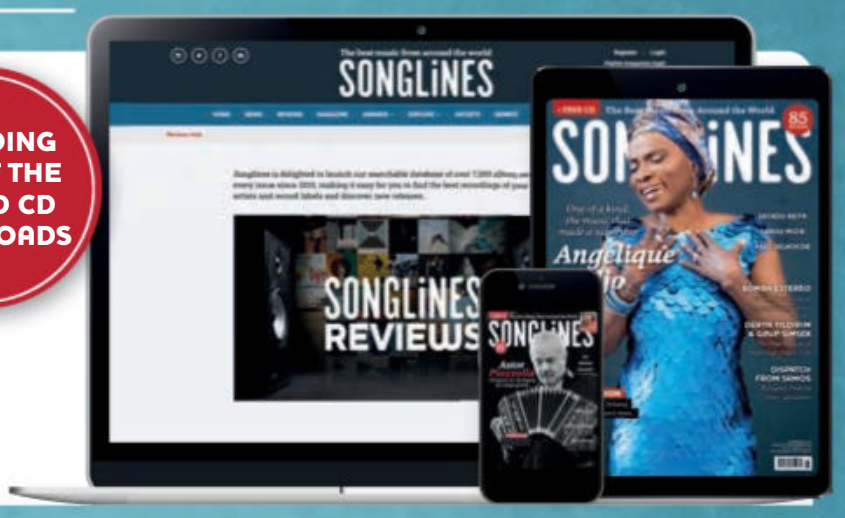


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This assurance is similarly reflected on '40 y MM', a track where Laferte celebrates entering her 40s. '*I'm 40, and mami / no one dies from love / if it doesn't kill you, it makes you stronger*,' she sings in the chorus, later referring to herself as a '*pop beauty*', a '*MILF*', a '*master*.' With a coolly assured downtempo beat that unexpectedly twists into a salsa, it's a musically unprecedented ode to getting older, decked with unapologetic self-praise.

Yet despite the thematic and musical deviances of the album from Laferte's previous work, *Autopoiética*'s success lies in its ability to blend her characteristic style into an ambitious new project with absolute coherency. She's retained the strongest elements of her previous work, deliciously integrating Latin styles into a new electro-beat backdrop: 'Metamorfosis' is a synth-cumbia that nods to 1990s Latin artists; 'Pornocracia' is a forlorn Peruvian waltz spoken from the voice of a scorned lover ('*tell me who is going to fill your nights?*'); 'Los Amantes Suicidas' a carefree salsa about indifference in an on-off relationship ('*Honestly, I don't care if you stay or go*').

The range of the album reflects the spectrum of emotions Mon Laferte sets out to capture, which is why she confesses to "hate" the word empower. She refers to the song 'NO+SAD' as an example: at the end of the track, she strategically included a sample of Los Angeles Negros, a Chilean band known for melancholia. "There's a lot of irony. I say '*I'm not going to be sad*' and end with a very sad song," she says. Laferte explains that her dexterity and ability to weave through emotions as she does genres is simply a part of being human: "We're human beings, we go back and forth," she says. "There are days I feel like a bad artist, I'm a disaster, other days I feel so powerful and *perra* [like a boss bitch]." ◆

**+ ALBUM** *Mon Laferte's Autopoiética is reviewed this issue, see p50*

## MONUMENTS

*Three epochal albums that chart the birth, rise and reincarnations of Mon Laferte*

***Mon Laferte (Vol 1)* (Universal Music Mexico, 2015)**

After being diagnosed with thyroid cancer Laferte (then known as Monserrat Bustamante) scrapped the album she'd been working on and reemerged as Mon Laferte, a signal that she'd changed. Although 2011's *Desechable* was the first album under this moniker, the Laferte of *Vol 1* was the first where she ditched the overt rock influences for a more sentimental sound drawing from *boleros* and filled with evocative horns that fit her sarcastic lyrics and dramatic character studies so much better.

***Norma* (Universal Music Mexico, 2018)**

Recorded in just one take with 13 musicians and no overdubs, this was not only a technical feat but a remarkable concept. Laferte explored a relationship through ten chapters/songs, each adopting different pan-Latin sounds, from *cumbia* through salsa and on to the glorious mambo of 'Ronroneo'. Upon it winning the Latin Grammy for *Best Alternative Album* Laferte shocked the audience with an anti-government protest, baring her breasts on which she'd daubed '*In Chile they torture, rape and kill.*'

***SEIS* (Universal Music Mexico, 2021)**

Laferte officially gained Mexican citizenship in 2022. This album must have helped the application. It was a full-scale tribute to Mexico's regional music, filled with *rancheras*, *bandas*, *corridos*, ballads and a little (ahem) *bossa nova* to mix things up. In particular, she had been inspired by Chavela Vargas, the Costa Rican singer who was also a nationalised Mexican, and it's hard not to think of Vargas on songs like 'Se Me Va a Quemar el Corazón', with just guitar and Laferte's soaring, and by-now world-weary, voice.

Alberto Hidalgo. Mayra Ortiz

# BURIED *Treasure*

***Nathaniel Handy*** unpacks the hidden roots of sea shanties in the plantation work songs of the American South and the Caribbean

Hear the phrase 'sea shanty' and what comes to mind? The glory days of sail, hauling anchor and a bottle of rum? Perhaps most of all, you might picture a 'salty dog' (slang for a wizened old sailor) – almost certainly a white man. And with good reason. Sea shanties became common aboard the British merchant vessels of the mid-19th century, helping crews to keep time in their tasks. By the mid-20th century, they had become something of an anachronism, harking back to a folksy, unmechanised age.

Like most things retro, sea shanties have seen a revival. Think of the success of Port Isaac's Fisherman's Friends, who even spawned a 2019 feel-good movie of the same name, and the TikTok sensation-turned-chart topper Nathan Evans and his take on the New Zealand forebitter shanty 'Wellerman'. Yet the distinctly British flavour of the genre has remained.

The fact that the origins of many, if not most, sea shanties lie far from Britain, among the slave populations of the American South and the Caribbean, may surprise those who consider this a quintessentially British folk genre. The emergence of many sea shanties from slavery is clearly illustrated in one of the most mournful and resonant of them all, 'Shallow Brown', which often includes the verse: '*Master's gonna sell me / Says he'll sell me to a Yankee / He says he'll sell me for a dollar / For that great big Spanish dollar.*'

Yet in much of the tradition, the links to slavery, or the African-American and Caribbean experience more broadly, is much less explicit. Jim Mageean, a folk singer from north-east England, is one of the greatest living authorities on sea shanties, learning his craft from Stan Hugill, the 'Last Working Shantyman' and the godfather of the British sea shanty tradition. Mageean presented his findings on the subject at an English Folk Dance and Song Society conference (available in a comprehensive blog at jimmageean.co.uk/post/the-black-origins-of-sea-shanties). He reveals fascinating details such as the fact that shanties were not sung aboard naval ships (especially during wartime, when it could alert enemies to your presence), and that while Britain was at war almost constantly from 1700-1815, the reverse was true of America. He suggests that this could be a reason for the work songs of the plantations jumping into the maritime setting in the American South. More specifically, he quotes a Captain Frank Shaw in observing that sea shanties find their origins in Black slaves being sent to the coast – either to load cotton aboard ships or to work as crews onboard – in the post-harvest season when they were expensive to keep on the plantation without work.

> THE IMPORTANCE IN THE **ORIGINS** OF **SEA SHANTIES** LIES IN REVEALING THE **TRUTH** OF THE **HISTORICAL RECORD**, BETWEEN **BLACK** AND **WHITE SAILORS**

Mageean's blog draws on eyewitness accounts throughout the 19th century, everywhere from British Guyana to the eastern United States. They speak of Black shantymen as the labour in cotton screwing – a demanding task which involved turning huge jackscrews to compress the cotton bales and load them into the hold of ships. The 'shantier' or shantyman would lead the song, while the others would join in the chorus, in the call-and-response structure so common to West African music.

One of the most famous cotton-screwing shanties – thanks to its appearance on Bruce Springsteen's *We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions* – is

Opposite page (clockwise from left): Fisherman's Friends; Jim Mageean; Clipper ship 'Three Brothers', the largest sailing ship in the world in 1875; Stan Hugill. Above (clockwise from left): Chantymen singing in rowboat in Saint Kitts and Nevis, 1962; Members of the Georgia Sea Island Singers, including Bessie Jones (center), 1960; Cornish shantyman Captain Leighton Robinson with part of his crew; She Shanties performing

'Pay Me My Money Down', which has its origins in the Black stevedores of the Georgia Sea Islands. These work songs bring to mind the *waulking* tradition of the Scottish Hebrides – work songs sung by women while rhythmically beating newly woven cloth to felt it into tweed.

"We began singing shanties with our dads," Esther Ferry-Kennington of the Whitby-based group, She Shanties, told *Songlines*. "But we're women going into a men's world." The role of women is significant. The sea shanty is – whether Black or white – often viewed as a distinctly male, even macho, genre. Consider all the fist-thumping and guttural yells. And yet, hard manual labour and the songs that accompany it have often been the preserve of poor women.

She Shanties perform the American shanty 'Johnny Come Down to Hilo' on their latest album, *Lubber's Hole* (reviewed in #190). "I feel my whiteness," explains Ferry-Kennington. "We've removed the racist language, but as we explain when we perform, [these songs] speak for the experience of enslaved peoples. The trouble is, we're still singing to largely white audiences."

Stan Hugill's seminal 1961 book *Shanties from the Seven Seas* includes about 120 shanties he ascribes to African American or Caribbean sources, noting the practice of 'chequerboard crews' – the segregation of the sailors into a Black watch and a white watch. However, Mageean notes that a man named Richard Dana heard shanties sung in the 1830s by a ship's crew that was a mixture of '*English, Scotch, German, French, African, South Sea Islands plus a few Boston and Cape Cod boys.*' This multicultural mix hints at the fertile exchange of songs and tunes that would inevitably have taken place in these maritime settings despite the inherent racism of the system surrounding them.

So, are shanties still sung in the American South or the Caribbean by Black communities today? "The latest shanties collected in the Caribbean were in the 1960s, as far as I am aware," Mageean tells *Songlines*. Many of these were collected by his old friend Hugill. "Two of the Barrouallie Whalers from St Vincent (collected by Roger Abrahams) are still alive but very old now. The Menhaden fishermen of Virginia and North Carolina are still singing but only as a choir. I hope the Georgia Sea Island Singers are still performing, although their leader, Bessie Jones, must be long gone." As for Mageean's favourites from the region, he names 'Down Trinidad', 'John Dead' (from St Vincent) and 'Brandy-O' (from Turks).

Acknowledging the origins of sea shanties should not be seen as a 'culture wars' victory for Black culture over white. Its importance lies in revealing the truth of the historical record, in which we discover that the path of these shanties from the plantations of the American South and the Caribbean to the British Isles was only possible due to interaction between Black and white sailors and stevedores.

In discovering this, we are reminded that our connections make us who we are. When we come to this awareness, sea shanties become not British folk songs, nor American or Caribbean songs, but *our* work songs, collectively. As Mageean eloquently puts it at the conclusion of his blog, '*it is important that we portray them as 'world music' with a multi-ethnic background.*' ◆

## FURTHER READING

**Jim Mageean**'s ***Heave Away – A Collection of Heaving Shanties*** (2020), ***Haul Away – A Collection of Hauling Shanties*** (2020) and ***Sail Away – A Collection of Forebitters and Sea Songs*** (2021)

**Stan Hugill** – ***Shanties from the Seven Seas: Shipboard Worksongs and Songs used as Worksongs from the Great Days of Sail*** (1961)

**Frank Thomas Bullen** – ***Songs of Sea Labour*** (1914)

**Cecil Sharp** – ***The English Folk-Chanteys*** (1914)

***Black Sailors and Sea Shanties***, Learning Resource from EFDSS (2015)

Jim Mageean, Alan Lomax Collection at the American Folklife Center, Library of Congress. Courtesy of the Association for Cultural Equity, Allan Wilkinson

# STEPPE BEYOND

**Raphael Rogiński**'s music ties together traditions old and new, from around the world… a search for identity and music that is anti-colonial, multicultural and open. "Everywhere I go, I meet extraordinary people," he tells ***Michał Wieczorek***

Raphael Rogiński was born in Frankfurt, Germany, the son of refugee parents who fled Poland, and he would eventually return to his paternal country, to live on the outskirts of Warsaw with his mother, who was half-Uzbek Tatar. His new album *Talàn*, his first after a six-year hiatus, is concerned with a search for his roots, and with it an understanding of what it means to be Eastern European.

"At some point I got tired with all this fascination with Galicia [an Austro-Hungarian province in present-day south-eastern Poland and Western Ukraine], with writers like Andrzej Stasiuk and Yuri Andrukhovych who are writing about Galicia as if it was the centre of the world. Galicia was an artificial region, a colonial project. And I'm vehemently anti-colonial," he laughs. Wanting to dig deeper, Rogiński travelled around the Black Sea region and beyond – to the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea, but admits it was Odesa [in Ukraine] that he fell in love with: "I feel at home there." This was partially because it was where his ancestors, arriving from Central Asia, settled before moving further west to Poland. It was also because of the city's ever-present multiculturalism and strong identity. "What interests me the most is a mix of cultures, their fluid margins. I hate nationalistic views of culture." Odesa for decades was a melting pot of Ukrainians, Jews, Russians, Greeks, Poles, Armenians, Tatars. "Even though Ukraine before the Russian invasion wasn't a perfect country, there was a sense of tolerance," he says.

While writing and recording *Talàn*, Rogiński visited not only these minorities, but spent time with Pontic Greeks, Azeri Jews, Tatars. The effect is a moving, meditative record for solo guitar, mixing influences from the Steppe (a grassland that spans from Ukraine in the west to Manchuria in north-east China in the east) with blues and West African guitar music, creating sonic landscapes. "I'm a visual learner, that's why all my music is so connected to images," he says. Even though his personal story is not the focus of the record, he says it is a soundtrack for his search and that for him the Steppe is the true origin of Eastern Europe.

Rogiński was one of the most prominent figures in a movement of new Jewish music that grew at the beginning of the 21st century in Poland, galvanised by events such as the (now defunct) Nowa Muzyka Żydowska (New Jewish Music) festival in Warsaw. A country with virtually no Jews left after the Holocaust once more became a centre for Jewish music and culture. Rogiński was central to this scene through his work in the groups Cukunft and Shofar. However, they were deemed controversial in the beginning. "In Cukunft we played the music of Jewish streets and brothels. Almost everyone from the Jewish community was saying that we were fuelling antisemitism, but I wanted to demystify the sugar-coated image of the pre-war Jews. They were real people, not only angels," he clarifies. Of those two bands only Shofar, consisting of Rogiński, saxophonist Mikołaj Trzaska and drummer Macio Moretti, exists today. But Cukunft and Shofar were far from Rogiński's only explorations of Jewish music. In Alte Zachen he played Hasidic surf rock, inspired by Orthodox Jewish surfers he saw in Israel, while Yemen featured improvised, jazzy renditions of Yemenite Jewish folk songs with the participation of Micheal Zerang, Perry Robinson and Wacław Zimpel.

"WHAT **INTERESTS ME** THE MOST IS A **MIX** OF **CULTURES**, THEIR **FLUID MARGINS**. I **HATE NATIONALISTIC** VIEWS OF CULTURE"

Rogiński jokes that controversy and contradiction should have been his middle name. His first solo record, *Bach Bleach*, was a radical deconstruction of Bach – played on the guitar, naturalistic, imperfect – which earned him critique from the classical music world and love from jazz and alternative music aficionados. "Bach was making me really pissed off. I was learning how to play the guitar [through] his compositions when I was 15-16. I was playing his pieces and didn't know what for and why," he recalls. This anger at Bach and everything his music represents – a sense of Western European supremacy, grandiosity, a cult of genius – is, as Rogiński says, at the foundation of his artistic path. "I don't worship any composer," he adds, albeit with Henry Purcell as a notable exception.

A record devoted to the Englishman's music was the last to be released before his break from the studio and was the final instalment in a trilogy of albums for Bôłt Records (the first featured renditions of John Coltrane songs adorned with poems by Langston Hughes and the second was devoted to Kurpie folk songs from Poland). "I'm fascinated with a mystery lying in Purcell's music," says Rogiński. "Recording it felt like a spiritualistic séance." The album, *…Plays Henry Purcell*, sounds halfway between renaissance music and a lost goth classic thanks to synthesizers played by Sebastian Witkowski and the deep androgynous voice of Olga Mysłowska. At the time of its release Rogiński said he heard a continuity in English music spanning from Purcell to Led Zeppelin, Joy Division, PJ Harvey and beyond, and wanted to highlight it. To say he succeeded is an understatement; *…Plays Henry Purcell* is captivating, full of love and respect for Purcell, but also Rogiński's signature contrariness. Even though he admits to not improvising around the Purcell pieces, his renditions are far from orthodox.

"One thing that helped in recording this album is my previous experience of playing the lute," he adds, referring to his playing of early Baroque and various Eastern lutes.

Collaboration is where Rogiński thrives. *Talàn*, a solo album, is an exception in his catalogue. Rogiński has not only started numerous bands but almost every one of his albums features guests. On *...Plays John Coltrane and Langston Hughes – African Mystic Music* he's joined by Natalia Przybysz, a jazz and R&B vocalist, and a star in Polish mainstream music. Rogiński takes the music of cult artists, geniuses, and transforms it into something of his own, searches for deeper, hidden senses. "Coltrane is too nice for me. It's like he was softening his music for white, affluent listeners. I'm more of a fan of his wife, Alice, Pharoah Sanders and Albert Ayler. Alice was much more talented than John and had an immense influence on his music. I wanted to look at his music through her eyes," he explains. As a visual inspiration for the album he chose a photograph of John and Alice in winter in Central Park. Indeed, it is music evoking snowy images, dim and muffled.

After a break from releasing new music, Rogiński is returning to his pre-2017 habits with a number of projects, ephemeral bands and multiple recordings. Among them are interpretations of Lithuanian folk music with zither player Indrė Jurgelevičiūtė and a record of solo *niguns*, a form of Hasidic devotional music that he regularly plays live. Early 2024 will also see the debut album release from Rogiński's latest group, Hizbut Jámm, a four-piece playing West African psychedelic music with Mamadou Ba, Noumassan Dembele and Paweł Szpura. The band took its name from *hizbuts*, Senegalese religious brotherhoods. It's not religious music, however, nor is it a reinterpretation of classic folk tunes. "One of my favourite bands ever is Guelewar Band of Banjul, you can hear almost anything in their music. I didn't want to write African-sounding songs, though. It just happened and then I decided to invite African musicians to play them with me," he says of the band's origins.

It all comes from a need to share: "I'm broadening my horizons and want to pass it on in my music. But, I don't want to speak from a position of authority, I'm just an artist," he says. A few days after our conversation, Rogiński starts another trip, to Georgia and Caucasus with the hope of meeting similar-minded people. "Everywhere I go, I meet extraordinary people. I don't look for them, I just have an open heart." ◆

**+ LISTEN** *'Electron' is on this issue's CD, track 12*

**WIN**

We have five copies of Raphael Rogiński's *Talàn* to give away. To enter, answer: in which city was the guitarist born?

See p25 for competition rules

Lena Sieczkowska

# Reviews

We review full-length world music, roots and folk albums (not singles or EPs), available on CD, digital or vinyl.
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Africa *44*
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Europe *52*
Asia *58*
Middle East *59*
Fusion *60*
Books *64*
Live *65*



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## Bounaly
Dimanche à Bamako

Sahel Sounds

★★★★½

If that title sounds familiar, it probably is: this album shares its name with Amadou & Mariam's 2005 masterwork – both albums honour the Malian capital's famous Sunday displays where weddings, street parties and other celebrations blanket the city with colour, food, extravagant dress and, of course, music.

This is Songhai guitarist Ali 'Bounaly' Traore's first full-length release, and it was recorded live, right in the middle of a Bamako Sunday. But he isn't from Bamako; he hails from the north of Mali, from Niafunké, where so many guitar greats have come before him. He is one of the capital's many internally-displaced northerners, whose numbers have grown dramatically since the outbreak of civil war in 2012. Those people need to party – that's Bounaly's job.

His rocked-up, cosmopolitan *takamba* sends the crowds wild. The group here consists of two vocalists, drum kit and calabash, but it's that raw and roaring guitar that carries it. Extended, effects-soaked solos, blasted out of a distorted PA and competing with the sounds of cheering fans and playing children – it's electric in every sense of the word. Hendrix once again casts his long shadow, as does Ali Farka Touré and Bounaly's uncle Afel Bocoum, ending up with something akin to Songhoy Blues at its most rough and ready.

*JIM HICKSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Tamala*

TOP OF THE WORLD

BUY NOW

## Bholoja
Imphilo

One World Records

★★★★★

Even though Swaziland has been renamed Eswatini, Bholoja – real name Mbongiseni Ngubane – remains the king of 'Swazi Soul', the title he gave to both his first two albums. *Imphilo* is his first release since 2015's *Swazi Soul II* and like its predecessors is a smooth and tender set of African troubadourisms, like a Siswati Cat Stevens – 'Mkhulu Longakimi' is even a setting of 'The Lord is My Shepherd' in the style of Stevens' 'Morning Has Broken'. The spine of the songs was recorded in a studio in Mbabane, the Eswanti capital, featuring just Bholoja's voice and acoustic guitar. Producer David Felgeirolles then added overdubs between Mbabane and Paris and far from ruining the simplicity of Bholoja's stripped-down single takes he's done a superbly sympathetic job. From the chiming Mark Knopfler-like guitar on the seven-minute opener 'Socalile' to the ethereal string quartet on 'Kusele Kancane' via the hurdy-gurdy on 'Sitayicela Ivutsiwe' and Wally Badarou's inventive keyboards on 'Touch from Heaven' the arrangements have a gorgeous, gossamer-like quality, while Bholoja's voice ranges from a soulful Youssou N'Dour falsetto to a relaxed baritone. African music is often made for dancing, swaying and feet-shuffling. With its gentle introspection this is a record that heads straight for the heart instead.

*NIGEL WILLIAMSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Mkhulu Longakimi*

## Katawa Singers
Digital Indigenous 05: Katula

1000 HZ

★★★★½

Hailing from northern Malawi, this gospel choir began their recording career by accident when they began collecting money to build a new Presbyterian church in Katawa and an overseas donor gifted them a Yamaha keyboard. The instrument lent a new aspect to their a capella choral singing and they went on to record a dozen albums as they toured Malawi, playing at festivals and church gatherings. In 2020 the compilation *Ufulu 1991-1997* brought the best of their early albums to the world's attention and this volume takes the story on with a bunch of recordings made after 2005 when Auden Nthala became their producer and founded a simple digital studio in which the computer became the main instrument augmented only by a single microphone, a MIDI keyboard and, of course, the choir's uplifting voices. The results could have been horrible but Nthala clearly knew what he was doing, for his mastery of the technology is total, conjuring a sophisticated palette of digitally-generated orchestral sounds complemented by exuberant local rhythms – *ingoma*, *malipenga*, *kamchoma* and others – all manipulated with consummate skill. Above all, the technology is never allowed to eclipse the Katawa Singers' greatest asset as it underpins and emphasises the glory of their rich vocal harmonies.

*NIGEL WILLIAMSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Yesu Mfumu Yamanakho (Jesus is the Answer to All Our Problems, We Should Cast Our Burdens to Him)*

## Ebo Krdum
Soga Jamailé

Epidemic Sound

★★★½☆

Sweden has proved to be a fertile home in exile for many African musicians, among them the Sudanese singer and guitarist Ebo Krdum. His 2021 debut album *Diversity* was a *Songlines* Top of the World choice, praised for living up to its title with an eclectic range of global influences that included Arabic music, reggae, Scandinavian folk and West African desert blues. 2022's *Revolt for Change* was more one-paced, heavily based on the Songhai style of his hero Ali Farka Touré, from whose TV and radio appearances Krdum learned to play guitar as a child growing up in Darfur before war and political upheaval forced him to seek asylum in Europe over a dozen years ago. *Soga Jamailé* is cut from the same cloth – indeed, if it wasn't for the different languages in which Krdum sings, you could easily think this was a West African album by Ali, Boubacar Traoré or Afel Bocoum. His deep voice sings passionately about the existential preoccupations of exile – peace, freedom, equality, liberty and other such day-to-day concerns and it's impressive and affecting. But you can't help wishing he'd mix it up a little more as he did on the aptly-named *Diversity*.

*NIGEL WILLIAMSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Soga Jamailé*

Daniel Dlamini

## Fela Kuti
Fela Box Set 6: Curated by Idris Elba

Partisan

★★★★½

Erykah Badu did it. So did Brian Eno, Questlove, Ginger Baker and Coldplay's Chris Martin. The latest celebrity to curate a limited edition box set by Afrobeat scion Fela Aníkúlápó Kuti is actor, DJ, rapper and singer Idris Elba, who tells us he overcame imposter syndrome to accept this mission: '*This was [my] Dad's music first,*' he reasons in the intro. '*It has been a joy for me to revisit these albums… they gather power with the passage of time.*'

While the albums on offer by Idris Elba were allegedly chosen to '*reflect the full spectrum of Fela's message to the world,*' Elba is limited by previous cherry-picking of Fela's extensive back catalogue. His selection purports to trace the genesis of Fela Kuti's evolving Afrobeat through the 70s and early 80s: 1971's *Open & Close* finds two electric guitarists helping to drive the jazz funk-meets-highlife wig-outs; and the young Tony Allen takes a rare drum solo on the title-track. *Stalemate*, *Opposite People* and the track 'I Go Shout Plenty' were all recorded in 1977, the year in which the Nigerian army brutally attacked Fela's Kalakuta Republic, their ire raised by a combination of ignorance, bloodlust and Fela's ridicule. There is debate as to which of these albums and tracks were recorded prior to or after the incident. But the slow-burning funk grooves and socio-political observations, half-spoken-half-sung, simmer with a clear fury regardless.

1980's *Music of Many Colours* – a joint album between Fela and American vibes legend Roy Ayers – is here, a glimmering gem, recorded after Ayers opened for Fela Kuti in Nigeria. As is 1983's *Live in Amsterdam*, which, albeit lifted by chanted choruses and forceful sax solos, is not a disc that captures the exhilarating showman at his best. Still, what with never-before-seen photos, an exclusively designed poster and that intro from Idris Elba, *Fela Box Set 6* is probably a must-have for any flush Fela Kuti fanatic. The Fela-brations continue apace.

*JANE CORNWELL*

TRACK TO TRY *Why Black Man Dey Suffer*

TOP OF THE WORLD

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## Negarit Band
Origins

Buda Musique

★★★★½

Bandleader (although he prefers the title 'Ethio Musicologist') Teferi Assefa, from Addis Ababa, earned his Masters degree in Jazz Drumming and Percussion at Poland's Karol Szymanowski Academy of Music before joining Lasta Sound, whose progressive fusion of traditional Ethiopian music with reggae and other genres earned their movie project, *Journey to Lasta*, the Best Music award at 2005's New York International Independent Film and Video Festival. After going on to co-establish Wudasse, another Ethio-jazz band popular both at home and in the US, Teferi formed Negarit over ten years ago as, what he calls, *'a platform for undertaking ethnomusicology and anthropology research and analysis efforts targeting Indigenous communities and their unique cultural heritages.*'

'Emahoy', dedicated to Ethiopian musician and nun Emahoy Tsege-Mariam Gebru, is an enjoyable opener, calling to mind the influences of Mulatu Astatke and Getatchew Mekurya — the big names associated with the plaintive, soulful sound of Ethio-jazz.

Upbeat, highlife-inflected 'Arba Minch (Gamo)' picks up the pace, integrating the unique, Indigenous rhythms of Ethiopia's Gamo and Welayta people. Funky, free-flowing, 'Yewelalia (Gurage)', based on a traditional wedding song, is another one of several highlights on this excellent collection of 12 mainly instrumental tracks released as part of Buda's *ÉthioSonic* series.

*RUSSELL HIGHAM*

TRACK TO TRY *Lalibela*

## Jaliba Kuyateh & Kumareh Band
Jang Fa Jang Kano

Jaalolu

★★★½☆

Gambian *kora* player Jaliba Kuyateh was taught the instrument by his father and, according to his biography, if the young Jaliba misbehaved, his punishment would be to spend an evening playing the kora alone. Far from this putting him off, however, he's built an international reputation over more than 30 years and is known in the Gambia and beyond as 'The King of Kora'.

*Jang Fa Jang Kano* opens with the title-track and Kuyateh's deep, resonant voice. The seven tracks are mostly in the style of Afro pop, blending traditional West African instruments with keyboards, electric guitars, bass and drumkit. 'Sheikh Karamba Suwaneh' is an exception – a more pared-back track with the kora playing against a rhythm of drums and finger-clicks.

This album was originally released in 2016 and has now been reissued on digital platforms. *Jang Fa Jang Kano* can be translated as 'Distance Relationship' and, according to Kuyateh, '*is dedicated to everyone in a loving relationship,*' and especially those in a long-distance relationship. Kuyateh's fans will be pleased another of his many albums is being made more widely available.

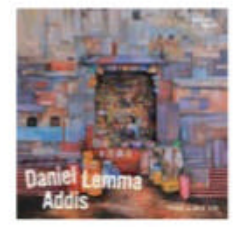
*TONY GILLAM*

TRACK TO TRY *Amie Jarjue*

## Daniel Lemma
Addis

Dextra Music

★★★★½




Born in Addis Ababa in 1970 and growing up in Sweden, Lemma has been making music since his teens but is a new name to these pages, for until now he has worked predominantly in a mainstream pop-soul vein. For this album, he went back to the city of his birth to record with Ethiopian musicians and the result is a unique and rather thrilling kind of fusion. His voice and songs draw on classic 1960s/1970s American R&B but here they're accompanied by the Ethiopian *krar* or lyre, the single-string *masenqo* (lute), flute and other traditional instruments, while Abegasu Shiota on keyboards, bassist Henock Temesgen and guitarist Girum Mezmur prove equally adept in Ethiopian and western styles as the album switches back and forth between the two. The swinging 'Fendika (feat Nardos Wude Tesfaw)' and 'Pass It On' boast terrific western pop-soul melodies on which the influences of Curtis Mayfield and Donny Hathaway are self-evident. On the other hand, 'Gonder', which features the keening voice of Nardos Wude Tesfaw, is steeped in Amharic tradition and sounds like it might be a thousand years old while the organ-heavy 'Ketema Taxi' could have wandered in from one of Francis Falceto's *Éthiopiques* compilations. Somewhere in between, songs such as 'Mountain Rose' and 'Wede Addis Ababa' miraculously combine the two.

*NIGEL WILLIAMSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Fendika*

## Rapasa Nyatrapasa Otieno
Jopango

Rapasa Nyatrapasa Otieno

★★★½☆

If Rapasa Nyatrapasa Otieno's *KWEChE* was something of a disappointment in 2021, *Jopango* proves much more coherent and satisfying. To the fore still are the social and political issues that Otieno has long pursued in his music. But it's in ▸

Negarit Band

the obvious musical development since then that this ten-track set claims attention. Hailing from Kenya and living in Newcastle upon Tyne in England's north-eastern corner, Otieno has become more adept and sophisticated in his championing of the *nyatiti*, an eight-string, double-necked lyre popular with the Lüo community around western Kenya's Lake Victoria. More subtle and sure, too, in his blending of the instrument's distinctive timbre with elements of *benga* and *soukous*, and a high-lying singing style that often gently leans towards falsetto. A more danceable proposition than its predecessor, *Jopango*'s title-track is immediately infectious despite its portrait of urban woes at Christmas time. 'O Nelly Benga' is a buoyant tribute to Otieno's multi-hued heritage, the call to 'Unite' across Africa's many ethnic divisions a veritable anthem in waiting. *Jopango*'s emotional mood is noticeably more diverse than *KWEChE*, the mellow 'Ukalo Matek' floating on liquid rhythms, 'Adipo Kidoro' a light and lyrical album closer.

*MICHAEL QUINN*

TRACK TO TRY *Jopango*

## TP Orchestre Poly-Rythmo
### Le Sato 2

Acid Jazz

★★★★½

Latest in Acid Jazz's reissue programme from the legendary Benin record label Albarika Store, this newly revived vintage gem was Orchestre Poly-Rythmo's follow-up to 1974's *Le Sato*, emphasising the orchestra's immersion in the rhythms of *vodoun*. A *sato* is a large ceremonial drum measuring around five feet in height, played with wooden stick beaters and supported by a panoply of percussionists and smaller drums to create layered, trance-inducing polyrhythms. For Poly-Rythmo, it was a base onto which they added flavours of James Brown, 1970s psychedelic guitar, skin-tight Nigerian Afrobeat and deep and heavy vodoun funk.

To put it simply, this vinyl-only release captures the impact of the Poly-Rythmo players at their peak, in all their peacock finery, on a record that hosts five expansive, immersive tracks. It begins with the ten-minute 'General Gowon', opening with funky guitar, a drum pattern with enough propulsion to power a rocket, a sax line big enough to claim its spot on Google Earth, and the silken vocals of Melome Clement. The following eight-minute 'Gendemou Na Wili We Gnannin' is a spacey, limpid, multi-dimensional guitar workout, while the closing 'Je n'en Peux Plus' features wah-wah pedals and an earworm of a melody. Classic 1970s Afro-funk at its best.

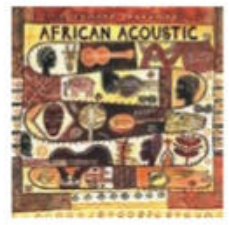
*TIM CUMMING*

TRACK TO TRY *General Gowon*

## VARIOUS ARTISTS
### African Acoustic

Putamayo

★★★½☆




A few years back *Songlines* used to be deluged with multi-artist budget-priced compilations like this one. Indeed, there were so many of them that they came to resemble a plague – and this reviewer has to plead guilty to having compiled some of them. Since then the bottom has dropped out of the comp market, overtaken by Spotify playlists and the like. Most of the record companies involved seem to have disappeared but Dan Storper's Putamayo, who were the pioneers in the field, are still going – and collections like *African Acoustic* make one rather glad that they have stuck with it. We get ten diverse contemporary singer-songwriters from the African continent, some familiar and some less known, but it all hangs together as a splendidly coherent listening experience as all the best mixtapes should. Longstanding *SL* favourites here include Guinea Bissau's Kimi Djabaté and South Africa's Louis Mhlanga. New names (at least to this reviewer) include a pair of impressive singers from Burkina Faso in the haunting bluesman Salif Diarra and the smoky-voiced Moussa Koita, Madagascar's Mikahely and the Canadian-based Kenyan songbird KeruBo. All leave you wanting to investigate and hear more – which, of course, is the principal *raison d'être* for compilations such as this.

*NIGEL WILLIAMSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Dunian* by Salif Diarra

### The Soul of the Congo – Treasures of the Ngoma Label (1948-1963)

Planet Ilunga

★★★½☆

In the last ten years, Belgian record label Planet Ilunga has been on a mission to share a remarkable treasure trove of music from the 1950s and 60s in the two Congos. Their most recent offering takes us on a sonic journey back in time, shedding light on the earlier generation of musicians who laid the foundation for legendary Congolese rumba artists like Docteur Nico and Le Grand Kallé.

The Ngoma label, named after the Kikongo word for drum, was one of the 'big five' post-WWII Congolese record labels. This collection is a portal to an era when both the Congos were still under colonial rule, teetering on the brink of independence, and through the early years of freedom. The 69 tracks offer just a glimpse of the label's over 4,500 recordings (many now lost), featuring hidden gems that showcase the stylistic diversity of Ngoma's catalogue. From the buzzing *likembe* tones in Mundanda Antoine & Groupe Rythmique Ngoma's 'Mwana Aboyi Mama' to the traditional flutes and chants of Groupe de Flûtistes Bayeke Lulua Jazz' 'Fulukayi, Tshisuisa', and from the distinctly Cuban sounds of Charles Lembe & His Orchestra's 'Suavecito Mambo' to the melodic slide-guitar in De Saïo's 'Demowe', not to mention a ton of vibrant Congolese brass (try Antoine Kasongo's 'Leonie Bernadette').

Throughout the box set, the house bands shine brightly, but their recurring signature sound can occasionally make the collection feel somewhat repetitive. For seasoned connoisseurs, this offers a wealth of unearthed treasures, but for those new to the region's music, a more selective starting point might be best. Nonetheless, these recordings serve as invaluable cultural artefacts, restoring the voices and melodies of Congolese artists who played a pivotal role in shaping the rich musical heritage of the Congos.

*LUCY HALLAM*

TRACK TO TRY *Pete na Mosapi* by Kabangu Raphaël & Groupe Rythmique Ngoma

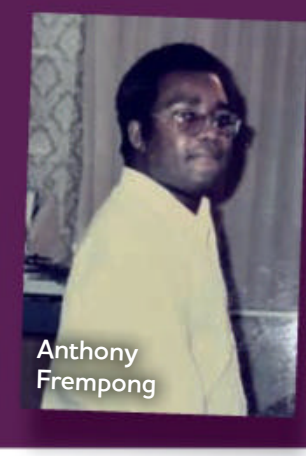
## BBE REISSUES ROUNDUP *by Nigel Williamson*

In the mid-1980s, the late Anthony Frempong founded Asona Records, running the label from Peckham, South London and releasing a cornucopia of Ghanaian highlife albums – and more specifically 'burger highlife', the electric fusion of traditional forms with contemporary rock and funk tropes which at the time was sweeping West Africa, Europe and North America. Over the years the Asona catalogue fell out of print but two years ago Frempong's family found two bin bags full of rare and long forgotten vinyl records while clearing out the family home. When Pete Adarkwah, owner of the BBE label, learnt of the discovery he moved swiftly to strike a deal to reissue Asona's lost treasure trove and we are now getting to hear the first reissues.

***Afrikaman*** (***) was recorded by **Nana Budjei** in London in the mid-1980s and shows burger highlife at its most expansive, taking in *soukous* guitars, reggae and even Caribbean steel drums, his stirring vocals matched by punching horns arranged by Osei Tutu from the band Edikanfo.

Tutu also produced ***Meba Fie – I'll be Back Home*** (***) by **Sam Yeboah**, about whom little is known except that he is not the famous footballer of the same name. His light-pop voice is attractive enough and the album includes at least one timeless gem in the old-style highlife of 'Daben Da'.

The title of ***Electric Hi-Life*** (****) by **Jewel Ackah** is a little misleading for the record is firmly rooted in old-school highlife dance music characterised by jazzy horns, African percussion and call-and-response vocals rather than the electro style favoured by many of his burger brethren. Best of all, though, is ***Anansi Shuttle*** (****) by **Thomas Frempong**, a veteran of Ghana's music scene from the 60s who moved to Britain in the 80s when he recorded this joyous album which represents the sound of burger highlife at its best.



Anthony Frempong

Jerry Frempong

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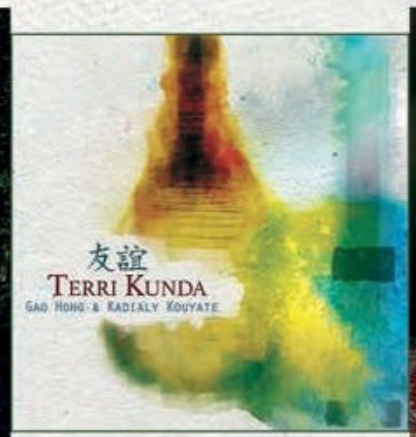

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## Daniel Brita
Britadeira

Amplifica Records

★★★☆☆

This seasoned Brazilian musician and producer's first solo album seems designed to divide opinion but challenge indifference. The minimalist minute-long opener 'Crocante' gives way to 'Eu Vi', featuring Evandro Camperom's vocals and redolent of DJ Dolores and the whole Recife sound. But then the title-track, translating as 'jackhammer', serves up a musical smash-and-grab raid: two minutes of brutal atonal jazz, with Brita playing alternate electric and acoustic bass lines. It's followed by 'Laser Beans (feat Thiago França)', in which a stop/start guitar motif decelerates into a duologue between electric guitar and tenor sax. Inspired by film noir, 'Pele de Espelhos (feat Rubi & F Sagawa)', carries the alluring voice of Rubi over subliminally discordant brass, before a tenor sax reinforces the cinematic ambience. Conceived as a soundtrack suggesting outer space and mirrors, 'Reflexo' picks up on and develops the unsettling brassy theme. On 'Existe Amor (feat Rubi, Alzira E & Arruda)', Brita overlays Rubi's vocal (recorded in 2012) with multi-tracked trombone to sketch the oppressive psychological impact of São Paulo. The brief 'Britatonal' is indeed atonal, a miniature piece for solo piano. Originally composed for his band Lobotomia, the final, frantic 'Vossa Excelência (feat João Limeira)' harks back to Brita's punk past. Impressive and provocative it certainly is, easy listening it definitely isn't.

*MARK SAMPSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Pele de Espelhos (feat Rubi & F Sagawa)*

## La Columna de Fuego
Desde Espana... La Columna de Fuego

Munster Records

★★★★★

Why it's taken so long for this gem of an album to be reissued is one of those mysteries that perhaps I will never work out. For while there have been seismic record-buying trends for Brazilian *tropicália*, Peru's guitar-led *cumbia* and even Uruguay's beat music, there has been little excavation of Colombia's youth music of the 60s and 70s, when Western pop, rock, soul and jazz took a flight to South America and made hay with the local rhythms. This sole album by La Columna de Fuego, originally released in 1974, is perhaps Colombia's finest example of the era. 'Cumbia' begins with drums and the sort of Afro-Colombian chanted vocals you'd expect from a song with that name, but then the funkiest of bass lines takes over and the horn section viscerally whips you into shape; 'Simplemente Hombre' gets even more soulful with a Jimmy Castor Bunch groove; and god knows why 'Tenmandumba' has not been on more compilations, it's pure Latin psych joy. There's even room for breezy The Zombies-esque pop on 'Nostalgia', though the best track is 'Carnaval en Barranquilla', adding wah-wah guitar and blaring horns to a *merengue* groove. La Columna de Fuego's members had form, having played in the more pop-oriented Los Speakers and the heavy proto-rock of Siglo Cero, but La Columna de Fuego was where they came alive with a glorious fusion of Western and Latin influences.

*RUSS SLATER JOHNSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Carnaval en Barranquilla*

Myriam Gendron

## Dorea
Grande Coisa

ajabu! / Budde Music

★★★☆☆

The title of the Swedish label's latest Brazilian release translates as Big Deal! This self-effacing singer-songwriter has waited till age 38 to broadcast the kind of songs he has been writing since his teenage years. Of the ten numbers he penned during the enforced isolation of lockdown, one is adapted from a passage in a book written by his mother. Together, his tales feed on the minutiae of everyday life, and it's probably fair to suggest that the lyrics, even in translation, are stronger than the melodies. Arguably, though, one can say this about Bob Dylan!

Seemingly rooted in rock, the singer's gentle voice and (mainly) acoustic guitar are hitched to the steady backbeat of electric bass and drums. Numbers like the title-track and 'Em Pedaços' (with its surprisingly electric guitar), are vaguely reminiscent of Syd Barrett at his simplest and most wistful. If 'unassuming' is the impression that this album leaves, there are some genuinely lovely moments. 'Suspiro' is gorgeous, simplicity itself. And Per Ekdah's arrangements with flute and clarinets really lift the two final songs. If Dorea's debut is not yet a big deal, there's enough to suggest that a bigger one could be forthcoming.

*MARK SAMPSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Suspiro*

## Fruko y Sus Tesos
El Violento

Vampisoul

★★★☆☆

'El Violento'? Julio Ernesto Estrada, aka Fruko, who ran for Colombia's senate in 2013? One hopes not. The veteran of over 40 albums for Colombia's Discos Fuentes probably earned a few monikers in his time, but maybe the most apt would be 'El Prolifico' (The Prolific One). The trouble is that Fruko and his well-drilled Tesos were so consistent and so dependable that it's hard to pinpoint highlights. Even that similarly hard taskmaster James Brown made a few duds. Vampisoul's latest reissue, from 1973, is no better and certainly no worse than many others in the Fruko canon. True, there's 'Nadando', which would be a hit for Fruko's discovery Joe Arroyo, arguably Colombia's greatest salsa vocalist; there's 'Salsa 'Na Ma" with its pounding piano, crackling cowbell, sparkling brass and organ-led *descarga* jam; there's the cogent 'Lamento Cubano', which says it all in three crisp minutes; and there's the final, ambitious, seven-minute 'Mosaico Matancero' divided seamlessly into a number of sub-titled components. All good, in other words. But there's no immediately discernible USP – other than the suggestive title, which probably refers to the sheer relentlessness of the dance-oriented music. No room for soppy ballads here.

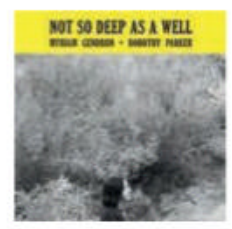
*MARK SAMPSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Lamento Cubano*

## Myriam Gendron
Not So Deep as a Well

Basin Rock

★★★★☆




For Québec-based musician, Myriam Gendron, it started with a book – a 1936 anthology of the poetry of Dorothy Parker, attractively bound in pink cloth with gold lettering. Gendron, who had never previously encountered the works of the American satirist and writer, gradually sank into Parker's unique world, and surfaced with a handful of songs, which she subsequently recorded at home. These recordings, initially released in 2014 via boutique label/shop, Feeding Tube, are made available here in Europe for the first time, together with two previously unheard tracks of contemporary origin.

The sound is intimate and enveloping, featuring just Gendron, her voice and acoustic guitar. Her rolling, finger-picking style proves the perfect accompaniment for Parker's words, at once forceful and gentle, rising and falling with a dusty, sunny beauty. Gendron's rounded, relatively deep vocals, together with her natural slight twang, sound entirely fitting, leaving little wonder as to the singer-songwriter's evident affinity with the source material. The songs themselves offer more than enough variety in terms of style and approach to carry this set through, ranging from shuffling, sparkling, mid-tempo numbers to delicately bittersweet, all of which are curiously affecting.

*CHRIS WHEATLEY*

TRACK TO TRY *The Red Dress*

Antoine Peuchmaurd

## Grupo Los Yoyi
Yoyi

Mr Bongo

★★☆☆☆

Launching the Brighton-based label's new *Cuban Classic Series* comes this curio from 1977, originally released on the Areito subsidiary of the state-owned Egrem label. Despite the then cultural embargo on Western music, fairly overt contemporary jazz-funk and disco influences infuse Grupo Los Yoyi's only release. Perhaps this one displeased the political grandees. Despite the occasional serious lapse in taste – 'Mi Pequeño Gran Paolo' serves up the era's dreariest leftovers, while the trombone feature, 'Abuela Tula', shouldn't have been allowed – most of the nine numbers exude an inoffensive charm. For all its rarity value, there's little really to justify the label 'classic'. The opening 'Banana' is a pleasing mix of squelchy keys, funky brass, pattering percussion and a singalong vocal refrain that sets the album's tone. There's a pronounced disco feel to 'Del Copacabana A34'; 'Paco La Calle' is a space-funk club cut featuring what sound like synthesized steel pans; 'Tu No Me Puedes Conquistar' is a cheery, good-time chunk of disco-funk; the la-la vocals of 'Yo, Mejor Te Doy' are substantiated by some incisive brass, tight enough to leave a faint echo of Irakere; and 'Ruta 30' is redolent of the more customary Cuban sounds of the era.

*MARK SAMPSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Yo, Mejor Te Doy*

TOP OF THE WORLD

BUY NOW

## Mito y Comadre
Guajirando

ZZK Records

★★★★★

Mito and Comadre (both noms de guerre: 'myth' and 'midwife') hail from Venezuela, but moved to Bogotá, Colombia in the last decade. Combining a deep knowledge of their country's traditional music and an intimate familiarity with modern production, they have produced an absorbing mosaic, reminding us that Venezuela is as much Amazon and savanna as Caribbean, with a complex cultural strata like layers of minerals formed over years by heat and pressure. Their approach is to create a continuous rhythmic core – often of coastal origin – and then circulate other sounds around it in a shifting haze of vocals, retro keyboard licks, basslines and samples. 'Será Que Pica' draws on African, Amazonian and syncretic musics, 'Va a Ver' nods to *soca* and the African musics that underlie it, while 'Palo de Agua' throws a glance at 1970s Miles Davis before emerging into uncharted territory with lurching drums and disjointed keyboards under an incantatory vocal. It's remarkable that this smartly produced recording, so assured and inventive, is the duo's debut. There should be many more.

*KIM BURTON*

TRACK TO TRY *La Quichimba*

## George Kahumoku Jr, Tia Carrere & Daniel Ho
Live on Tour

Daniel Ho Creations

★★★☆☆

A master and impresario of *kī hō'alu* (Hawaiian slack key guitar), George Kahumoku Jr opens this concert recording with a few brief and rather pleasant tunes, and the advice from his mentor that, "We should be sharing our Hawaiian culture outside our *ohana* [family]." The 72-year-old Kahumoku has made a lifelong global mission of this, touring and recording extensively. Musician and producer Daniel Ho and actress and singer Tia Carrere, are a generation younger and from Hawaii, now living in Southern California. Their sharing of their native culture here is infused with other musical influences. Appealing to *haole* (non-native) audiences are familiar offerings like 'Aloha 'Oe' (sung by Carrere in a luminous alto, as she did on the soundtrack to Disney's *Lilo & Stitch*), the original form of 'Hawaiian War Chant' (adapted by Tommy Dorsey and others) and a Hawaiian take on 'Brahms' Lullaby' in 'Hiamoe Maika'i'. Ho pairs sweetly with Carrere on some vocals and provides piano accompaniment and soloing in a dulcet style evocative of the late George Winston. For more strictly traditional Hawaiian music by Kahumoku and others, with vibrant vocalisations and gorgeous open tunings and ornamentations of guitar and ukulele, look to Winston's Dancing Cat label.

*JEFF KALISS*

TRACK TO TRY *Nā 'Ono O Ka 'Āina*

## Julieta Laso
Pata de Perra

Otro Planeta

★★★★☆

Laso, a key figure in contemporary Argentine tango, teams up with producer Aldo 'Macha' Asenjo of Chilean *cumbia* outfit Chico Trujillo, to explore a collection of deeply treasured songs. While many are revered classics from Latin America and Europe, Laso breathes new life into each, skillfully revealing the depth of melody and lyrical poignancy. Her profound and captivating voice is beautifully complemented by guest singers, including fellow Argentine Vicentico (of Fabulosos Cadillacs), Cuban urbanite La Dame Blanche and Asenjo himself. Their harmonious support, folding in melodies and sharing verses, intensifies the emotional resonance of every track. The vibrant energy Laso exudes permeates a collection that embodies her artistic restlessness, as she fearlessly explores diverse musical genres, from Chilean *nueva canción* (Violeta Parra's 'Ausencia') to tackling formidable French classics, offering Spanish versions of Piaf's 'Non, Je ne Regrette Rien' ('No Me Arrepiento de Nada') and Cabrel's 'Je L'aime à Mourir' ('La Quiero a Morir'). It is evident that these are songs that Laso holds a deep affection for, and she performs them with the utmost respect and delicacy, in the company of musicians she greatly admires. Needless to say: it works.

*CHARIS MCGOWAN*

TRACK TO TRY *El Mago y la Publicidad*

Isla Colectivo

Novalima

## Airto Moreira & Flora Purim
Sounds, Dreams & Other Stories
A Celebration: 60 Years

BBE Music

★★★★★

These two prolific octogenarians have represented Brazilian jazz royalty for around six decades, so it's high time for a three-CD, five-LP retrospective of their illustrious careers. Whether recording and/or playing live together or individually, their list of collaborators reads like a Who's Who. Suffice to spotlight time with Miles Davis, Cannonball Adderley, Paul Simon and Hermeto Pascoal.

Taking its starting point as Flora's deliciously smoky 'Jeito Bom de Sofrer' from 1965 – several years before meeting her future husband, while still immersed in her native Rio's *bossa nova* scene – and Airto's irresistible 'Papo Furado (Jive Talking)' from 1971, the compilation ranges across their discographies to 1994 and 'Hungry on Arrival', a number recorded by Airto's South African project, Outernational Meltdown. On tracks like her friend Milton Nascimento's ravishing 'From the Lonely Afternoon', 'Black Narcissus' and 'Summer Night', Flora's ethereal voice dances above the music like some diaphanous spirit. If perhaps she symbolises Brazil's rivers, then Airto is the forest. His first toy was the tambourine-like *pandeiro*, and his highly individual, multi-textural percussion colours numbers like 'Celebration Suite' and the perennial favourite, 'Toque de Cuíca'. Together they achieve a mandala-like symbiosis on 'When Angels Cry'. A befittingly essential package.

*MARK SAMPSON*

TRACK TO TRY *When Angels Cry*

## Novalima
La Danza

Six Degrees Records

★★★★½

The Peruvian band, Novalima, blend Afro-Peruvian music with electronica, Latin American beats, and other contemporary genres. This intoxicating mix has seen them evolve over the course of 20 years, as part of the shifting soundscapes of the global African diaspora. Their latest album, *La Danza* – released, at least at first, as two EPs – is a pulsating offering. Conceived during the paralysing lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, its tracks exude a joyful rebellion.

Movement, and a sense of reclaimed physical and spiritual autonomy through movement, are everywhere on *La Danza* – not least on the album's bristling opening title-track, the percussion on which (if not the overall energy) reminds me a little of the wonderful Congolese band Kasai Allstars. Other stand-outs include the earworm 'El Tiempo', featuring acclaimed Brazilian singer-songwriter Dom La Nena, and the xylophone-heavy 'Amanecer'. Overall, *La Danza* has a confident swagger, and although the sounds and influences shift emphasis from track to track, there's also continuity between the layers of musical sediment. It's a confident and deeply enjoyable statement from a band that is clearly still evolving, exploring, and having fun.

*MERLYN DRIVER*

TRACK TO TRY *La Danza*

SONGLINES REVIEWS
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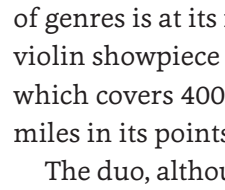
## Okan
Okantomi

Luluworld Records

★★★★½




In recent years Cuba's Santería religion, a vigorous survival of West African religious practices reconstituted as Catholic adoration of the saints, has become almost ubiquitous in its homeland and spread widely outside the country, attracting devotees of non-Afro-Cuban and indeed non-Latin ancestry. While the two members of Canada-based Okan, violinist Elizabeth Rodriguez and percussionist Magdalys Savigne, are both Cuban and followers of the religion, and although this album is built on chants to the African deities, it is by no means liturgical, or even entirely religious. It is certainly not a recreation of folklore, even while drawing on it. In terms of content, both jazz and baroque are in the mix, with elements of rock, *timba* and Latin music in its more sentimental moments. This deliberate unsettling of genres is at its most dramatic in the violin showpiece 'Preludio y Changüi' which covers 400 years and 5,000 miles in its points of reference.

The duo, although clearly dominant in terms of writing, arranging and performing, are joined by a number of skilled collaborators. These are smart, intelligent dance songs, with great drive and a deep understanding of past and present.

*KIM BURTON*

TRACK TO TRY *Oriki Oshun*

## Mireya Ramos & The Poor Choices
Sin Fronteras

One RPM

★★★★½

Two-time Latin Grammy award-winner Mireya Ramos has released her second album, *Sin Fronteras*, co-produced with Beau Bledsoe, founder/director of chamber orchestra Ensemble Ibérica. Born in California to Mexican and Dominican parents, Ramos is now based in NYC where she founded its first all-women *mariachi* band, Flor de Toloache. Now, in *Sin Fronteras*, she collaborates with a line-up of 25 musicians, including the Ensemble Ibérica, Texmaniacs and Slim Hanson & The Poor Choices. The album's ten tracks offer a rich blend of *ranchera*, pop, jazz and R&B, which as Ramos puts it, "showcases the similarities between styles of music and traditions that on the surface may seem very different."

To some, ranchera horns alongside country slide guitar riffs might jar at first, but somehow, they do blend happily. Some tracks, such as the remakes of classics 'Blue Bayou (feat Trevor Turla & The Burney Sisters)' and 'I Fall to Pieces (feat Keyon Harrold & Calvin Arsenia)' have a nostalgic feel, but with their own fresh authenticity. Multi-instrumentalist Ramos impresses too with her vocal range, sometimes soft and lilting, at other moments with a raunchy edge, providing great contrast with Slim Hanson's gravelly drawl on 'King Nothing (feat Texmaniacs)' and 'There Stands the Glass (feat Texmaniacs)'. All in all, a gem of an album; borderless indeed, but full of harmonious heart and soul.

*HUW HENNESSY*

TRACK TO TRY *Quiero Volver (feat Asdru & Flor de Toloache)*

## Mon Laferte
Autopoiética

Universal Music

★★★★½

Chilean singer-songwriter Mon Laferte believes her latest work is also her best. The title refers to an entity's capability to reproduce, or rebirth itself, a testament to Laferte's intent to deviate from her previous work, which has spanned pop, rock, *cumbia* and heavy metal, scooping four Latin Grammys in the process. She describes *Autopoiética* as deeply self-reflective. For a creative who has lived in the volatile environments of Chile and Mexico, battled cancer and courted controversy with a topless political protest, there is surely plenty to ponder.

Opener 'Tenochtitlán' is equal parts grand orchestra and floating trip-hop, with spacey beats echoing around Laferte's dramatic, soaring vocals. From there, it's straight into 'Te Juro

Francisco Medina

Que Volveré', an off-kilter, accordion-driven number adorned with rattling hand percussion. For the remainder of its run-time, *Autopoiética* explores soundscapes as diverse as moody salsa, thumping breakbeat, fizzing pop and slow-burning ballads.

Laferte's earnest and impassioned delivery unifies the tracks, which resonate with a simmering undercurrent of instability. On even the brightest numbers, there is a sense (often correct) that something unsettling lurks just around the corner. The results are striking. Mon Laferte may well be correct in describing this as her most accomplished record to date.

*CHRIS WHEATLEY*

TRACK TO TRY *Autopoiética*

## Montañera
### A Flor de Piel

Western Vinyl

★★★☆☆

The contribution and influence of Colombians and a new generation of Anglo-Colombians to the development of Latin music in the UK, as performers, bandleaders, teachers and entrepreneurs, has been tremendous, and not only in the field of popular music. However, this cultural contribution remains desperately underestimated.

Recent arrival María Mónica Gutiérrez makes a few nods to the music of her homeland, most clearly in the marimba-infused, Pacific coast styles of 'Santa Mar' and 'Como una Rama' where the dance music of the Caribbean is stripped of its rhythmic component to hang freely, draped in bright synth washes and bass grumblings, interspersed with oblique rising scale patterns. However, as a whole it cleaves to the field of somewhat experimental Spanish language electronic popular music, with a heavy emphasis on the suspension of time and the use of multiple types of distortion, notably on the very interesting 'Tú'.

Montañera is clearly a project conceived and directed by a single mind. The positive side of this is that it makes for a formally and tonally coherent piece of work, while the downside is that it can lack the spark that collaboration can bring. It will be interesting to see what moves Gutiérrez makes in the future.

*KIM BURTON*

TRACK TO TRY *Bajar*

Travis Gauthier

## Los Ruphay
### The Three Seasons of the Andes – Kimsa Pachanka

ARC Music

★★★★☆

The Aymara herders of Bolivia refer to three annual seasons: *Lupi Pacha* (dry season), *Jallu Pacha* (rainy season) and *Thaya Pacha* (cold season). This understanding of the natural world lies at the heart of the Andes' Indigenous cultures. It's also present in the way that Los Ruphay, in tribute to their late founder and director Mario P Gutiérrez, are seeking further international recognition of Quechua and Aymara peoples, and an understanding of their plight in the face of climate change and marginalisation, through their music. Several decades of Andean music have been popularised in the West through groups such as Los Ruphay – extant since the 1960s – making us familiar with many of the sounds on this record; *siku* (panpipe), *charango* (small lute), etc, but Los Ruphay avoid the worst excesses of Westernisation and pastiche that have been layered atop this culture, instead, presenting an unabashedly simple recording of traditionals and original Gutiérrez melodies woven into a narrative tapestry of sound evoking the annual Andean cycle. Listen to the rains, the strong mountain winds, the creaking of glaciers and the harvest dances.

*TOM NEWELL*

TRACK TO TRY *Lupi Pacha*

## VARIOUS ARTISTS
### Solar: Sun Ra in Brasil (Red Hot + Ra)

Red Hot Organization

★★★★☆

One of the most enigmatic figures in jazz, whose musical legacy and Afrofuturistic mythology stretched way beyond genre limits, this Brazilian celebration of the American composer, keyboardist, bandleader and poet, Sun Ra, presents a magnificent reimagining of his music and poetry, brought to life by an outstanding cast of Brazilian and American artists. This is the second volume in the *Red Hot + Ra* series – following *Red Hot & Ra: Nuclear War* – and is dedicated to promoting climate justice and equality. Album opener 'Astroblack Orunmilá' sees the coming together of the Salvador-based Orquestra Afrosinfônica and vocalist Jazzmeia Horn, in a stunning version that pulses with the traditions of Congo, Maracatu and Blocos Afro. A joyous recasting of 'Nature's God (Sun Ra Sam Ba)' by multi-instrumentalist Munir Hossn, drummers from Aguidavi do Jêje and vocalist Meshell Ndegeocello depicts Ra dancing samba in the Brazilian rainforest. Two of the album's eight tracks feature poems by Ra, 'O Código (Black Prince Charming) ' and 'Eu Sou um Instrumento (I Am an Instrument)', performed in Portuguese by actor Fabrico Boliveira, with telling contributions from the Bahian musician Edbrass Brasil and the wondrous Horn, respectively.

*PETER QUINN*

TRACK TO TRY *Astroblack Orunmilá (feat Jazzmeia Horn & Orquestra Afrosinfônica)*

TOP OF THE WORLD

BUY NOW

## Corey Ledet Zydeo
### Médikamen

Arnaudville / Nouveau Electric

★★★★★

Now 15 albums deep, the music of Texas-born, Louisiana-living *zydeco* busker Corey Ledet remains as vital as ever. However, this time it's personal, with Ledet taking listeners on a journey of family reclamation via his latest long player, *Médikamen*. While the subject matter has shifted, the intent hasn't, meaning Ledet is firmly straddling the line between ragtime, jazz, be-bop, zydeco and good ol' fashioned Creole blues. To be sure, the inherent message here is one of roots, culture, and country, as evidenced by accordion-filled cuts like 'Alon Kouri Laba' and 'Kofè T'fé Ça'. But what truly shines is the fluid collaboration between Ledet and fellow scene veterans such as Lee Allen Zeno, who plays bass, and Lucien 'Big Lou' Hayes on guitar, along with Cecil Green, who lends his Hammond B3 and Fender Rhodes talents throughout. Recorded at Dockside Studios in Maurice, Louisiana, and presented entirely in Ledet's native Creole language of Kouri-Vini, which nicely accents the vibe of 1800s family roots, *Médikamen* isn't just ambitious, it's perhaps Ledet's most personal and all-encompassing triumph yet.

*ANDREW DALY*

TRACK TO TRY *Alon Kouri Laba*

## Eliza Carthy & Jon Boden
Glad Christmas Comes

Hudson Records

★★★★★

'*Glad Christmas comes*' is the opening line from 'December' in John Clare's poem *The Shepherd's Calendar*. Carthy and Boden sing it, unaccompanied, fulsomely, to a tune of their own, doing Clare's poem proud. His magnificent celebration of the season includes village bells; '*singing wates*' – carol singers; morris dancing; a mummers' play; wassailing and holly. As if they take their cue from Clare all these feature in Carthy and Boden's selection of songs. 'Ashen Bowl' is a wassail; Boden's 'The Good Doctor' works through the narrative of a mummers' play; Carthy's fiddle interlude in 'The Holly and the Ivy' conjures the pealing of bells.

'The Holly and the Ivy' is one of several familiar songs offered in less than familiar forms. 'Mount Zion' is 'While Shepherds' but to a tune sung in The Royal, Dungworth, a pub where the Sheffield carol singing tradition thrives. 'Fairytale of New York', the most ubiquitous secular Christmas song, becomes a morris tune (it works).

Carthy and Boden augment their considerable vocal and instrumental resources with Backstage Brass – wonderful in 'I Saw Three Ships Come Sailing In' and all New Orleansy in 'I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas', the voices of Emily Portman and Tim van Eyken, salting celebration with an intimation of mortality in 'Remember Oh Thou Man', and some sonic morris dancing from Ewan Wardrop.

Carthy and Boden are such forthright performers, launching into a song like a lifeboat down a slipway, that you doubt they've left themselves room to build, yet they do in 'Mount Zion (While Shepherds)', while in 'Winter Grace' they sing with touching tenderness.

*JULIAN MAY*

TRACK TO TRY *I Saw Three Ships Come Sailing In*

TOP OF THE WORLD

## Makushin
Move into the Luminous

Blackford Hill

★★★★½

The cool, ambient depth charges embedded across *Move into the Luminous* come from prolific double bassist Jon Thorne (Lamb, Yorkston Thorne Khan), guitarist Peter Philipson and the exquisite voice of Nancy Elizabeth. The three leads fronting this inspiring musical collective explore the tidal flows between folk, jazz and ambient, with contributions from saxophonist Martin Slattery, the vibes of Andrew Wasylyk, guitarist David A Jaycock and improvisational drummer Andrew Cheetham.

Think the ambient forays of Brian Eno, David Sylvian, Holger Czukay and more or less the whole of ECM's record catalogue. And then settle back, lean in and let your ears flow into the exquisitely embroidered soundscapes the trio and their guests summon up across its ten tracks. Elizabeth's voice is a marvel – reminiscent of The Breath's Ríoghnach Connolly, and Thorne's prominent bass is a key driver across the album, and richly expressive on the likes of 'Send Love to Nara' with its layered, shimmering backdrops, and the otherworldly, dronetastic 'Landscape', topped by Slattery's sax. These two instrumental pieces are among the highlights, with Elizabeth's voice across 'No More Rush Hour' another, supported by skitterish drums and bass, and a ringing, minimal guitar line. An album that's rich, absorbing and delicate to the touch.

*TIM CUMMING*

TRACK TO TRY *Send Love to Nara*

## Rodrigo Cuevas
Manual de Romería

Sony Music

★★★★★

For some years now, Rodrigo Cuevas has been living in a little village in Asturias, retreating from contact with big city life. One could say that he follows a similar road with his music: he is deeply invested in researching traditional songs from the Spanish regions of Asturias, Galicia and Leon, looking for those who still sing the way they were taught by their elders (and four of them even make it to *Manual de Romería*, through Cuevas' own field recordings). That is Cuevas' inward movement. Then comes the outward.

And the outward movement in this case means that building on top of those fragments of tradition, Cuevas instils new life into these melodies, lyrics and structures from the past, resorting to electronics and pop music codes. After *Manual de Cortejo*, an album dedicated to courtship, he now explores the power in popular gatherings and upholds partying as a way of celebrating and fulfilling every single right over our bodies. Putting Eduardo Cabra (from Calle 13) in the producer seat, Cuevas creates a masterpiece of tradition updated and dance oriented, as in 'CÓMO YE?!', weaving different songs into a single piece in 'CASARES', singing about birds with the help of the Corsican vocal group A Filetta, flirting with operatic voices in 'YO NUN SOI MARINERU' or giving Asturian tradition a glorious sensual anthem in 'MÁS ANIMAL (feat iLe)'.

A stunning triumph.

*GONÇALO FROTA*

TRACK TO TRY *Más Animal (feat iLe)*

## Don Kipper
Always Can't Go On Forever

Riverboat Records

★★★★½

Since their widely acclaimed 2018 album *Seven Sisters,* which celebrated the cultural roots of the band, Don Kipper have been on a transformative musical journey that builds on their London spirit to create an all-new sound. *Always Can't Go On Forever* is an eclectic mix of electronic grooves, disco basslines, psychedelic funk, political statements and raw ambition to re-think their Balkan and Mediterranean heritage.

The album is a collection of fierce political narratives delivered in English and Greek from the lilting lead vocals of Dunja Botic, following Balkan and klezmer flows, rock breakdowns, disco rhythms and occasional African excursions. An album that cleverly transports you from your living room, to protest junctures, to the dancefloor.

It is the band's collaborative endeavour to create the new, be heard, and to evolve while still holding onto their values and who they are, that really shines through. There is an honesty and integrity to what has been created. Starting with the thumping 'Hot Tub', followed by the future-questioning 'Nani', the album continues with interludes of grandeur, with a Northern Greek nod in 'Truthful', funk-fueled 'Day to Day', and the Maghrebi-influenced 'Ya Leyli', there is something for everyone, even a dalliance with spoken word.

*BUZZ BURY*

TRACK TO TRY *Utopia*

## Bryony Griffith & Alice Jones
Wesselbobs

Selwyn Music

★★★★½

*Wesselbobs* were akin to Christmas wreaths, decorated evergreen foliage, but woven on a spherical frame. These were carried from house to house by wassailers and carol singers in West Yorkshire. In taking *Wesselbobs* as their title, Bryony Griffiths and Alice Jones encapsulate their intent with their excellent new album: to explore and celebrate the local – their – culture, which surely is the role of folk musicians.

Brian Roberts

'The 'Ollins and the Ivin' is 'The Holly and the Ivy'; 'Hark How all the Welkin Rings' is 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing'. But the language and the melodies differ. The carols are familiar, yet different, Griffith and Jones casting them in an intriguing local light.

'I Traced Her Little Footmarks in the Snow' is a music hall song absorbed into the repertoire of local singers, entering the oral tradition. 'Ripon Sword Dance' comes from that side's mumming (folk) play. With 'Hagman-Heigh', they radically claim that the Hogmanay tradition has its roots in West Yorkshire... There may be trouble ahead!

'Hagman-Heigh' is beautifully sung, unaccompanied, in harmony. On all the other songs Griffith plays the fiddle, stoutly; Jones the plangent tenor guitar, adding ballast on the harmonium.

In 'The Yorkshire Wassailing Song' the singers crave food and money. Several songs speak of the cold, of snow and ice. The climate, Griffith and Jones' choices suggest, is changing; poverty, well, less so.

*JULIAN MAY*

TRACK TO TRY *The Yorkshire Wassailing Song*

## Johanna Juhola
A Brighter Future

Nordic Notes

★★★☆☆

The past century-plus of recorded accordion music in Finland has been dominated by dance music, epitomised by countless polkas and minor-key Finnish-style tangos. Fleet-fingered accordionist Johanna Juhola often plays dance music and tangos, but far from the national *schlager* tradition.

Since her 2005 debut, she's created a fresh, virtuosic mix of *tango nuevo*, folk, jazz, pop, hip-hop and electronic dance music – delving further into that on her self-produced fifth solo album. Her first in five years, she has a band whose members have played with Rinneradio and Jaakko Laitinen.

The high-tech production sounds chilly and mechanical on tracks such as 'Elektroniikkakerho –Electronics Club', 'Micro Wave + House Band' – complete with household appliances – and 'Pachinko Sensei', inspired by arcade games and Japanese multi-instrumentalist Shugo Tokumaru, all driven by relentlessly energetic keyboard work.

Fortunately, there's also a warmer, more lyrical side to *A Brighter Future*, especially 'Lähiökesä – Suburban Summer', a melancholy childhood memory sprinkled with playground echoes. 'Alarm', the album's only tango, is complex and unsettling, with sirens in the distance. The title-track, a midtempo *schottische* featuring electronic underpinning and wordless vocals from Venla Ilona Blom of Tuuletar, leads perfectly into Johanna Juhola's bittersweet closing number, 'Viimeiset Jamit – The Last Jam Session'.

*WIF STENGER*

TRACK TO TRY *Lähiökesä – Suburban Summer*

## Ragnhild Knudsen & Pauliina Syrjälä
Talende Strenger / Kertovat Kielet

Taragot Sounds

★★★★☆

Look no further than this Norwegian/Finnish collaboration for a textbook example of how musicians and producers should convey their music to listeners. The sleeve notes, the illustrations and photographs are not simply informative but have a real sense of communication. Little touches such as '*this fiddle likes to be tuned high*' reminds us that each *hardingfele* (Hardanger fiddle) has its own personality.

On to the music! It feels as though Knudsen, a highly respected fiddle player at the heart of Norwegian music for many years, and Syrjälä, a magical Finnish *kantele* (zither) player, were destined to play together. *Talende Strenger / Kertovat Keilet* translates as 'Talking Strings'; the two musicians spent hours talking and, importantly, listening to each other to create tracks which draw on their respective traditions in a superbly sensitive yet adventurous way. The high silvery strings of the fiddles are mirrored in the wire-stringed kantele which is not only plucked but played with wooden and even metal sticks adding a brilliantly textured, luminous edge alongside thoughtful and engaging dynamics.

The tunes are cheeky and playful ('Halling' or the *polska* 'Matts Näsi') and mysteriously melancholy ('Rykalintu') and the playing is always exquisite.

*FIONA TALKINGTON*

TRACK TO TRY *Jarand Skinnarland*

## Gavin Marwick
Quarterdays

Journeyman Records

★★★★☆

Characterised by contemporary tunes delivered with a traditional vibe, fiddler and composer Gavin Marwick's exciting new project is a swaggering and thoroughly nourishing listen. Marking a celebration of the old Scots Quarter Days, four six-track EPs featuring a special guest were released over 2023. Now the four discs are being released as a special box set just in time for Christmas and a live concert at Celtic Connections in February.

*Candlemas* opens with the tail end of winter and thoughts of spring to come. Aaron Jones' cittern proves a perfect accompaniment to the fiddle in a series of jigs and reels to mark the closing of the winter. *Whitsun* welcomes the beginning of summer, and the relaxing promise of warm days to come is perfectly captured in the duet between fiddle and Wendy Stewart's harp, while *Lammas* focuses on the harvest, a time of bounty and festivity, and the joy in the duet of Marwick's fiddle and his partner Ruth Morris' *nyckelharpa* is palpable and infectious.

*Martinmas* marks the end of the year, and Marwick, along with Phil Alexander on accordion and piano, conjures up a fiery European mix with Hungarian and French influence, making it a perfect accompaniment to a mulled wine or two. Accordion and fiddle are a natural duo, and the pair's close relationship in Firelight Trio ensures a dancing, collegial, soundscape. The *Quarterdays* series is an absolute delight with a splendid selection of reels, jigs, and *strathspeys* to whirl us through the traditional year. 12 months of joy.

*BILLY ROUGH*

TRACK TO TRY *The Vintners*

## NYTT Land
Torem

Napalm Recordsl

★★★☆☆

Shamanic couple Natasha 'Baba Yaga' and Anatoly Pakhalenko bring you another haunting Siberian offering with *Torem*. It's an invitation to the stories and cosmology of their land, through dark mysticism, ancient percussive rhythms and singing in the languages of old.

*Torem* (Great Sky) opens with the sound of birds over the expanse. Indeed, the album is named after a place where the souls of people and animals are reborn as birds.

The shamanic journey then turns to atmospheric horns and chants of ritual and progresses with the ancient drums and throat-singing of 'Risu Raknar'. The jaw harp and lyre continue to draw you in to learning from the wisdom of the Great Spirit. The cinematic expanse and intensity of the songs swell and retreat as you drift in and out of ceremony with eerie vocals, synth drones, hypnotic drums and tones.

As the spiritual adventure continues, the intensity and intention grow; field recording, horns, jaw harp, throat-singing and shamanic, driving drums guide and collide.

The album is a mystical Siberian journey, with the songs connecting nature, mythology, history and culture through storytelling, haunting and atmospheric melodies, and meditative dark grooves.

*BUZZ BURY*

TRACK TO TRY *Johem Ar*

## Fiachra O'Regan
Na Beanna Beola

Fiachra O'Regan

★★★★☆

It's a been a long wait for Fiachra O'Regan's solo follow-up to his 2008 debut, *Aisling Gheal*. The time in between has been spent in Canada as part of the Irish-Québécois trio, Fásta, along with fiddler and vocalist Sophie Lavoie, and guitarist André Marchant. *Na Beanna Beola* sees O'Regan returning, if only in spirit, the album recorded in his adopted Québec, to his native Connemara. Time and distance seems only to have deepened the call of home and the romance of its rugged beautiful landscape. There are also glancing nods in ornamentation and fingering to the inherited legacies of Séamus Ennis and Michael Carney, but O'Regan is very much his own man here. Switching between pipes tuned to B and D lends variety, character and nuance to a 14-strong set led by jigs, with whistles adding their own poetic piquancy to a quartet of slow airs. O'Regan takes a largely steady-as-she-goes approach to the jigs and allows the reels due briskness and animation. But it's the slow airs borrowed from the *sean nós* singing tradition that threaten to steal the show, the haunting 'An ▸

## Times New Román
### Jól Élünk (We Have a Pretty Good Life)
Times New Román

★★★★★

This is the debut recording of a pretty new Hungarian band who were one of the local highlights of 2022's Budapest Ritmo. While most Hungarian bands tend to be led by strings, Times New Román are dominated by the clarinets, alto saxophones and reedy *taragots* of Márton Deáky and Bence Babcsán, and backed by the piano accordion of Benedek Réti. Much of the music is inspired by the Gypsy musicians of Romania and Serbia's Banat region. Most tracks are tunes built up into lengthy suites, like the 15-minute 'Suita de la Kot', which begins with a slow bittersweet melody over accompanying viola and speeds up with bubbling clarinet melodies tumbling over each other or playing in thirds.

The clarinets go from plaintive to playful in an instant. There are three tracks in homage to particular Gypsy musicians: one for one of Romania's greatest accordionists, Vasile Pandelescu, another for taragot master Luca Novac, learned from his recordings, and lastly to Hungarian clarinet player András Puporka. The mellow 'Bánáti Angyal (Banatian Angel)' is also a tribute to Romanian saxophonist Nicu Anghel Ministeru and is particularly memorable. The Transylvanian-sounding 'Program Ardeal' is full of Romanian-style irregular rhythms and shifting tempos. A fine conclusion to the impressive debut of a strong and distinctive band.

*SIMON BROUGHTON*

TRACK TO TRY *Suita de la Kot*

Bonnán Buí' and aching 'An Caisideach Bán' drawn from the 17th and 18th centuries, alongside the forlorn, Marcus Hernon-penned 'The Invisible Corncrake', all dispatched with a soulful plangency.

*MICHAEL QUINN*

TRACK TO TRY *An Bonnán Buí*

## Synnøve Brøndbo Plassen
### Den Lyse Dag
Heilo

★★★★☆

Far from being a difficult second album, Plassen's latest release reveals how much her voice and her approach to the traditions of her home region of Østerdal have blossomed even since her excellent 2021 debut *Hjemve*.

Norwegian music traditions are often rooted in the history and everyday life of quite small rural communities. Here Plassen has put together an album which takes us through a day in the lives of women working on farms, from early morning milking to calling the cattle home, followed by a much needed glass of something and a psalm to end the day. (If you don't speak Norwegian then the word *ku* – cow – will get you quite a long way!)

Across 22 short tracks Plassen's voice is versatile, agile and engaging, welcoming and warm. Calling the cattle by their names is remarkably beautiful ('Såmmårlauv og Sale') and there's a playful edge in 'Mari Munkedeje', admonishing a woman who has overslept and missed milking. There are outstanding examples of the traditional *lokk* (calling the animals) with breathtaking vocal acrobatics, and some compelling *tralling* (diddling) based on children's wordless nonsense syllables.

A true showcase of the wonders and depths of Norwegian traditions.

*FIONA TALKINGTON*

TRACK TO TRY *Mari Munkedeje*

## Kate Rusby
### Light Years
Pure Records

★★★☆☆

There came a time when certain carols were no longer welcome in church. So people went to the pub and sang them there. It's a tradition still lively in Yorkshire and as a child Kate Rusby spent many a Sunday afternoon in the taproom, eating crisps and colouring in, while all around her people sang. This made a profound impression on her and every December Rusby goes on tour with a band to sing these songs. She records them, too – *Light Years* being her seventh Christmas album.

Rusby does not, though, tie herself to that tradition. As well as a version of 'While Shepherds Watched' (titled 'Rusby Shepherds') and 'Nowell, Nowell' she includes 'It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year' and 'Rockin' Round the Christmas Tree / Sleigh Ride', Chris de Burgh's 'A Spaceman Came Travelling' and even Sid Kipper's parodic (yet heartfelt) appeal for the detaining of carol singers, 'Arrest these Merry Gentlemen'.

There's a variety of musical treatments, too, with lovely brass (arranged by Andrew Duncan) especially on the opening track, 'Spean', a kind of funky banjo on 'Rusby Shepherds' and aptly cosmic synth in 'A Spaceman Came Travelling'. The production of 'The Moon Shines Bright', which features Alison Krauss and Ron Block, is lush. But Rusby, singing sweetly, catches the poignant allure of this Gypsy carol.

*JULIAN MAY*

TRACK TO TRY *The Moon Shines Bright (feat Alison Krauss & Ron Block)*

## Rüüt
### Kiriküüt
Nordic Notes

★★★☆☆

Rüüt is an Estonian quartet who recorded their first album in 2015, not to be confused with the more minimal Duo Ruut, also Estonian, who sing vocals over a shared zither. I first saw and was impressed by the quartet on the extraordinary all-night Folklandia cruise in 2019, although they've changed their line-up since then. The band includes accordion, *kannel* zither, guitar and violin with harmony vocals and they combine arrangements of Estonian traditional tunes with their own music. *Kiriküüt* (a playful word for nightingale) includes a rather catchy title-track presumably about the bird with harmony vocals over kannel and punchy accordion. The diatonic accordion of Juhan Uppin is a real asset adding a lot to a song like 'Jännupoig' with its rhythmic vocals. The rhythm of the words plus accordion is also what drives 'Kukumama'. The opening 'Toonetuuled' (Winds from Toonela) refers to the mythical underworld known as Tuonela in the Finnish Kalevala. In Estonia, before bird migration was discovered, it was thought the birds went to Tuonela during the winter. *Kiriküüt*'s ten songs are a varied and enjoyable listen.

*SIMON BROUGHTON*

TRACK TO TRY *Kiriküüt*

## Adam Semijalac
### Ode Dite
Adam Semijalac

★★☆☆☆

This is a curious release from Croatian guitarist and singer-songwriter Adam Semijalac. He's deliberately put his guitar away and picked up a banjo and two much more primitive plucked instruments, namely the Serbian/Croatian two-stringed *dangubica* and Bosnian *bugarija* lute. He writes repetitive lyrics which, he says, speak of '*the intergenerational trauma brought about by wars*.' Unfortunately there are no English translations.

Most interesting are haunting and strange tracks like 'Nije Moje' (Not Mine), a simple repetitive melody accompanied by these curious plucked instruments plus droning female voices sounding almost like a flexitone in the background. Less interesting is 'Čile Zime' (All Winter), a voice and banjo song. He says the album is also about facing the consequences on his voice of cancer surgery. '*How to go on working*

Márton Bolyki

*as a musician after the instrument with which I worked most of my life has been destroyed?'* This probably accounts for the simple and repetitive vocal lines and why, unfortunately, the album feels more like a process of personal therapy than exceptional music making. The closing title-track, the words of which seem pretty bleak, is surprisingly sparky with ringing strummed strings.

*SIMON BROUGHTON*

TRACK TO TRY *Nije Moje*

## Sharon Shannon
Now & Then (Box Set)

The Daisy Label

★★★★½

Now here's a brilliant bumper box set. It contains CDs of 12 Sharon Shannon studio albums, including a brand new set, along with a remastered LP of her 1991 self-titled debut set (supposedly still the best-selling album of traditional music in Irish history), a re-remixed 7" vinyl version of 'The Galway Girl', and a 100-page photo-book. It's a reminder of the extraordinary role she has played in the history of Irish music, both as a multi-instrumentalist and composer, playing accordion, whistles and electric guitar, while matching new arrangements of traditional material with her own tunes, and influences from almost anywhere in the world. There's everything here from country and Cajun to reggae, tango, Spanish, Chilean, Middle Eastern, Canadian, Portuguese and African styles, along with a dash of hip-hop, while on *Flying Circus* (2012) she is backed by the RTÉ Concert Orchestra. Many of the tracks on *Now & Then* are instrumentals, dominated by Sharon's glorious accordion work, but she also steps back to provide accompaniment for great singers including Sinéad O'Connor, Kirsty MacColl, Jackson Browne, Steve Earle, John Prine and Shane MacGowan. Every album here is different, but instantly distinctive, and the only (minor) disappointment is the non-inclusion of *Sacred Earth* (2016), a fine set which annoyingly had to be left out '*for contractual reasons*.'

Sharon's latest album *Now*, is (for now) only available on this box set. It's largely instrumental, dominated by Sharon's tunes, but with some predictably unexpected tracks. The delightfully silly 'The Diddley Doo' shows off her sense of fun in the company of Dublin '*acoustic rock*' group The Scratch, while the poignant and emotional 'Séamus' celebrates the life of West Kerry musician Séamus Begley, and the slinky and gutsy 'The Zonkeys of Easkey' matches her accordion, fiddle and whistles against Justin Adams' electric guitar, bass and percussion. 32 years on from her debut, Shannon can still delight and surprise.

*ROBIN DENSELOW*

TRACK TO TRY *Séamus*

## Siger
When We Fly

Trad Records

★★★½☆

Hartwin Dhoore and his younger brother, Ward, are a duo from Rodeland in Belgium. They take their name, Siger, from Siger den Rode who was the first landlord of the region, and their music is rooted in Flemish tradition. They have, though, toured internationally for 15 years and being on the road in Scotland, the US and Germany has influenced their tunes.

Hartwin plays a three-row diatonic accordion; Ward, the mandola. There is a pleasing interplay between these instruments; in the opening track 'Orchard Breeze' Hartwin's squeezebox evokes a zephyr stirring the trees, Ward's mandola the fluttering of leaves.

Hartwin makes interesting use of his accordion's bass, creating sonorous drones and chordal backgrounds, in 'Linus' for instance, over which Ward's mandola flourishes melodically. At other points, as on the penultimate track, 'Airboys', they match each other precisely, note for note.

Their melodies are lovely, their playing expert and the album is enjoyable. But Siger's music is only occasionally exciting, rarely wild. The title-track, though, is a whirring of wings and, in the slow middle section, a gentle gliding. Hartwin and Ward share the close understanding of siblings and here they do, musically, fly.

*JULIAN MAY*

TRACK TO TRY *When We Fly*

## SVER
Legacy

Folkhall Records

★★★★½

This brilliant Norwegian/Swedish quintet are celebrating 15 years together and they continue to thrill with their take on traditional tunes from both countries. One of ▸

## Leon Rosselson
Chronicling the Times

Free Dirt / PM Press

★★★★★

The cover photo of *Chronicling the Times* shows Leon Rosselson playing guitar and singing in the street, the classic image of an angry protest singer. Rosselson is certainly a musical activist who has enlivened many rallies and demonstrations, but he is also one of the finest, bravest and most original singer-songwriters that the British folk scene has produced. His work rarely gets heard on the radio, which is why he is not as well known as he should be, but he has had a hit song. In 1985 Billy Bragg included Rosselson's 'The World Turned Upside Down' on his *Between the Wars* EP, and the story of the 17th-century radical idealists, the Diggers, made it to #15 in the charts. For Bragg, Rosselson is '*the embodiment of the original ideals of punk rock – using fearless wit and political integrity to highlight the hypocrisies of those in power*.'

He has enjoyed a lengthy career. In the 60s he was part of the popular folk group The Galliards, joined Martin Carthy in The Three City Four and toured with the poet Adrian Mitchell. As a soloist he has moved from witty topical songs to thoughtful or bravely outspoken pieces that tackle an extraordinary array of topics. This 17-song retrospective – personally chosen by Rosselson – shows his range, musical skill (often in the company of Martin Carthy) and his fascination with history, politics and ideas. There are songs about the search for a better world, from 'Bringing the News from Nowhere', about the ideals of William Morris, through to the sad and thoughtful 'Song of the Old Communist', whose dreams of a glorious new world have never materialised. 'Postcards from Cuba' updates the same theme, evocatively examining how dollars and tourism have taken over from revolution, but '*if you down enough mojitos, you'll believe that dreams come true*.'

Elsewhere, there's a witty and bitter attack on the Iraq war on 'General Lockjaw Briefs His Troops (As Recorded by a Sceptical Soldier)', a furious reaction to the 2008 financial crisis in 'Where are the Barricades?', and topical folk-rock from the 80s, featuring Billy Bragg and members of The Oyster Band, on 'Ballad of a Spycatcher'. Lyrics for all the songs are included, but it's worth also checking out Rosselson's new book *Where are the Elephants?* which provides a background to the songs as part of a free-wheeling autobiography that includes his thoughts on anything from communism to Christianity, Israel, political songs and his admiration for the French singer-songwriter who is the subject of the song 'The Ghost of Georges Brassens'. And he devotes a chapter to the ideas behind one of his most controversial songs, 'Stand Up for Judas', in which he argues that Jesus '*betrayed the poor*' and that Judas is the true hero. Rosselson has never cared if he causes offence.

FEATURED REISSUE

*ROBIN DENSELOW*

TRACK TO TRY *Stand Up for Judas*

the trademarks of their sound is magical textures: they have developed a style which has a driving energy and a clarity allowing the exquisite playing of each musician (fiddles, accordion, guitar, mandolin and drums) to shine through. Even in full-on numbers such as 'Lördagskvällen' (Saturday Night) there is light and space while the humour in 'Gymnastikken' is never cheesy because the instruments interact and tease with such musicality and delight.

While each musician is worthy of mention, the fiddle playing of Olav Luksengård Mjelva is a reminder of how much he has contributed to the popularity and high standards of the traditional music scene in Scandinavia and beyond. For sheer variety, listen to 'Tamnes' with soulful and heartfelt performances from each player, and the final 'Valser' is a lyrical crowd-pleaser – SVER really know how to work a room.

*Legacy*, they say, is a tribute to all the traditional musicians from the past who have inspired them, but in fact SVER will go down in history for their own outstanding contribution to music.

*FIONA TALKINGTON*

TRACK TO TRY *Lördagskvällen*

## Jenni Venäläinen
## Melkutus Party

Nordic Notes

★★☆☆☆

The zither-like *kantele* has its roots deep in Finnish history and Venäläinen, on her debut album, embraces its beauty and magic by combining tradition and versatility as performer and composer. The *melkutus* of the title refers to the stories of a dance which might have gone on all night, or even over days with the dancer falling into a deep trance. Fast forward to today, and we have the inspiration for what the musicians describe as a '*hypnotic mix of tradition and electronics*.'

Venäläinen treats us to old Finnish dance tunes, teasing their rhythms playfully until they leave their old village dance halls behind. She mostly uses her 19-string warm-sounding kantele; even more beautiful is the ten-string instrument she uses on 'Sirgo'. This, however, is only part of the album's '*hypnotic mix*': the aim is to combine tradition with party music, and electronic beats drive each track amid finely crafted soundscapes with the result that the kantele detail is often lost in the depths of a forest of sound.

Finnish village dance halls are turned into vibrant club sounds, which is fine if you do want to dance all night long.

*FIONA TALKINGTON*

TRACK TO TRY *Sirgo*

## Vimma
## Tornadon Silmässä

Nordic Notes

★★★★☆

The word '*vimma*' means 'frenzy' in Finnish and this young band's frenzy is against climate change and the despoliation of nature. The album's title, *Tornadon Silmässä*, means 'In the Eye of the Tornado' and it's about the sense of peace that vocalist Eeva Rajakangas gets when she is at the heart of a demonstration of some sort. She and composer/violinist Pessi Jouste are involved in Elokapina, the Finnish equivalent of Extinction Rebellion, and are frequently stopping traffic, protecting forests and, most dramatically, blocking a Russian coal train travelling across Finland. The song 'Antrasiitille' (For Anthracite) is the most powerful on the album (with a striking video too) and linked to the train demonstration. She sings over frenetic fiddling and insistent drumming as she repeats the words '*kun vuosii palaa*' (decades burning) over and over again.

Vimma describe their music as '*progressive folk*', but folk is more a description of the function of music in spreading a message than its sound. There are some folk ingredients, but also rock and contemporary sounds.

Some of the songs, like the anthracite one, and 'Kasveille' (For Plants) are very clear in their message, but others, like the opening 'Maailmanloppu' (The End of the World) are rather more opaque, but in this case very beautiful. This song is also included in German and English. Vimma are one of the most dynamic bands addressing the climate crisis.

*SIMON BROUGHTON*

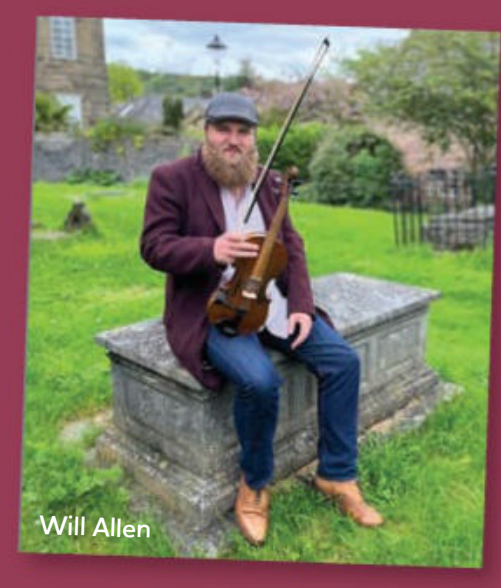
TRACK TO TRY *Antrasiitille*

# BRITISH & IRISH FOLK *by Tim Cumming*

Young singer-songwriter **Wayne Brereton** from County Offaly has performed with The Younge Wolf Tones and his own Cardinal Sins band, but here on ***The Robin's Call*** (Wayne Brereton ***) he explores the world of balladry, with a warming, soft-focus sense of tonality across the album's seven tracks, featuring singer and pianist Eva Coyle on the mournful 'Mountains of Pomeroy', with its delicate mix of guitar, piano and whistle, and with fine musical support from fiddler Trisha Mulraney and Bernadette Moran on whistle. The closing lyrical airs of 'Come Rain or Come Shine' sum up the album's warm, enveloping feel perfectly.

Following on from her trio's *Mousehold* album, exploring the regional folklore of her native Norfolk, **Georgia Shackleton**'s debut solo set ***Harry's Seagull*** (Georgia Shackleton ***) is named after legendary Norfolk source singer Harry Cox, and is the one original song on this traditional set, which includes big songs like 'The Blacksmith', set to a spare musical backing of fiddle and harmonium, while tune sets such as East Anglian step dances 'Watsons Hornpipe / Swanton Abbot Hornpipe' and pieces from Peter Bellamy ('Rambling Robin') and San Larner ('Come, Little Leaves') are all standout tracks, especially Shackleton's high, spectral fiddle on the latter.

Last year, **Will Allen** put out *English Fiddle*, a set of English tunes with cittern player and double bassist Rowan Piggott. A year on, he's back with ***English Fiddle II*** (Will Allen ****), but this time with extra layers – of drones, twin fiddles and melodeon – across a set that encompasses northern polkas, Cotswold morris and plenty from Playford. There's plenty to chew on here, and the playing is excellent, with a nod to major players in the English instrumental tradition – Tom Kitching, Belshazzar's Feast. Cotswold morris tune 'Idbury Hill' is a keeper, as is Scan Tester's 'The Man in the Moon', and the last tune of the set, the lovely 'Jamaica'.


Will Allen

Glaswegian multi-instrumentalist **Dan Brown**'s second album, ***Nomad*** (Dan Brown ***) celebrates, across 12 instrumental tracks, the benefits of immersion in the great outdoors. It features an extensive cast of guest players – Peatbog Faeries' alto saxophonist Norman Willmore on the ambient, heavily treated evocation of late-night car journeys, 'Hundreds and Thousands'; whistle-player Tiernan Courell fleeting sonically across 'Roke Island', and a string section of Juliette Lemoine on cello, and The Canny Band fiddler Laura Wilkie on the delicate opener 'Crystalline'. Its focus is on the clearing of the mind's malodorous clutter under the sway of the great outdoors.

**Jack Rutter**'s soaring voice and masterful guitar has graced many an album and stage, and ***This is Something Constant*** (Jack Rutter ****) is the final album of a trilogy he began with his acclaimed *Hills* in 2017 and continued with 2019's *Gold of Scar & Shale*. Here, rare child ballads, songs from his native Yorkshire and more are brought to life with the support of Rutter's propulsive guitar and *bouzouki*, as well as harmonica, concertina and harmonium and guest turns from whistle and flute legend Mike McGoldrick and Scottish fiddler Patsy Reid. They're all crackers, with 'Many's the Night (The Harvest Home)' an energetic standout.

**Muíreann Bradley** is a teenage blues player from Donegal and her debut, ***I Kept These Old Blues*** (Tompkins Square ***) is a deftly-chosen and confidently performed and sung acoustic blues set. The Rev Gary Davis' 'Candyman' opens the set, as Bradley fingerpicks and sings through Elizabeth Cotten's 'Shake Sugaree' and the epic tale of 'Stagolee' from Mississippi John Hurt. The imagistic 'Green Rocky Road' and the haunting melancholy of 'Delia' are luminous highlights on a striking debut set.

Rowan Piggott

LISTEN NOW!

On this second label workshow from the labels Nordic Notes, CPL-Music and Beste! Unterhaltung gets one song from each of the last 20 releases from the years 2022/2023.

**Rüüt** *Kadrile* / **Vimma** *Maailmanloppu* / **Okra Playground** *Veri* / **Jenni Venäläinen** *Pyy* / **Merema** *Vay tyadyanay – avanyay* / **Baklava** *Kej* / **Lakvar** *Ki-Be (Ki nyirësbem be nyirësbe)* / **Alice in WonderBand** *Jovano, Jovanke* / **Anna Murtola** *Northwind Bulería* / **Emmi Kuittinen** *Surun synty* / **FRÄNDER** *Evigt regn* / **ENKEL** *Kipiä polska* / **Uusikuu** *Suklaasydän* / **Johanna Juhola** *A Brighter Future* / **Shono** *Buyan* / **Sähköpaimen** *Yötulet* / **Gankino Circus feat. Uusikuu** *Ievan polkka* / **Lena Jonsson Trio** *Nordanvinden* / **Umala Tevi** *Migla* / **Emilia Lajunen** *Viitasaarelta*

All albums of the songs on this compilation are available in well-stocked local record stores or **www.cpl-musicshop.de**

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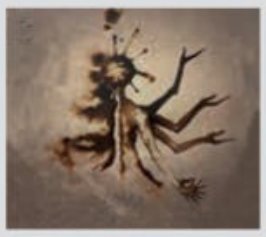

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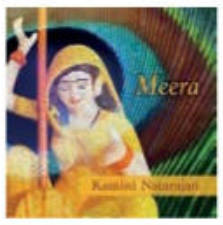
## Kamini Natarajan
Meera

Kamini Natarajan

★★☆☆☆




Living at a time when women were confined to the home, the 16th-century Hindu mystic-poet Meerabai (*bai* being an honorific for 'lady'), the only female poet in a very male domain, was wandering in the Rajasthani desert with mystics and mendicants chanting her poetry, the main theme of which was her love for and devotion to the Hindu god Krishna – a defiant love that earned her the wrath of her in-laws. Meerabai's work is cherished all over south Asia, with her poems recorded by many singers, perhaps most memorably on the film *Meera* (1979), whose music was composed by *sitar* maestro Ravi Shankar. The Los Angeles-based classical vocalist Kamini Natarajan pays homage to Meera in her own style with original compositions, accompanied by classical instruments such as sitar played by Will Marsh, with Eddie Young on cello and Ashish Ranade on *tabla* along with the *bansuri* (bamboo flute), *ghatam* (clay-pot drum) and *kanjira* (tambourine-like frame drum). Attempting to explore the timeless beauty and wide-ranging emotions depicted in Meera's poetry, Natarajan has a pleasant, soft voice but it is, at times, understandably challenged by the need to express contradictory emotions: unconditional, loving devotion alongside a blatant defiance of established norms.

*JAMEELA SIDDIQI*

TRACK TO TRY *Daal Gayo Re*

TOP OF THE WORLD

BUY NOW

## Aditya Prakash
Isolashun

New Amsterdam Records

★★★★☆

Aditya Prakash's debut solo album with its phonetic spelling of 'isolation' appears to be a direct reference to the pandemic and its impact on creativity for this young, award-winning Karnatic (South Indian) classical musician but, equally, it could also relate to what he describes as the 'limits' of Indian classical music. Perhaps in an effort to escape from that aesthetic, he creates a space where the harmonious is juxtaposed with agitation to be deliberately abrasive and jarring. For instance, the opening track is a city soundscape – a cocktail of traffic, car horns, birds and muffled voices, most unexpectedly followed by an exquisite classical song on the second track where one realises that Prakash has the kind of voice which forces one to go on listening – silky and calm but always teetering on the edge of restlessness. But, for many listeners, 'XenoF.O.B' will be perhaps the most accessible: a famous North Indian light-classical song composed by the ruler of Lucknow when he was exiled by the British that speaks of the pain of leaving one's land which has been very wittily interspersed with extracts of US President Lyndon Johnson's famous speech on passing the US Immigration Bill of 1965. Final track, 'End', returns us to the purely classical and is perhaps the most beautiful end to any album.

*JAMEELA SIDDIQI*

TRACK TO TRY *XenoF.O.B*

## Hashshashin
Śaranam

Art as Catharsis

★★★☆☆

This is the third album from the Sydney-based trio. *Śaranam* means 'to take refuge' in Sanskrit and this is an appropriately reflective album of Central Asian-flavoured psychedelic post-rock. Where Hashshashin's second album, *Badakhshan* (2019) featured string instruments from across Asia, from Tajikistan, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, *Śaranam* has narrowed the focus around the woody sound of the Afghan *rubab* played by Lachlan R Dale.

Each of the three tracks here is named with a historic region of south Central Asia and a Buddhist concept. Opener 'Ghazni (Avidyā)', the album's highlight, starts with a flash of static, as if we've accidentally tuned into a mysterious radio wave. Then with a quick rap of the fingers against a wooden soundboard, we're launched into a song full of punchy rhythmic patterns. The rubab churns above the cyclic off-kilter patterns, but then everything fades into gentle, contemplative washes of sounds and a distant chant.

'Hadda (Dhyāna)' features similarly syncopated punches in the rhythms as it takes us on a nine-and-a-half minute journey and 'Sindh (Śūnyatā)' offers listeners a gentle exit. That opening static cuts in as if we've finally lost our mystery radio signal and the music fades into a dreamy sequence that seems to take us just beyond reach of the sounds of a spiritual gathering.

*ALEXANDRA PETROPOULOS*

TRACK TO TRY *Ghazni (Avidyā)*

## VARIOUS ARTISTS
Music in Covid Times

Tehzeeb Foundation

★★★★★

A treasure trove of North Indian classical and folk music, *Music in Covid Times* bagged all the most coveted categories at the recent Global Music Awards, including Best Album and Best Producer for Pakistan's Sharif Awan. Karachi-based Awan, who had already made waves with his extensive *Indus Raag: Music Beyond Borders* project back in 2016, is the founding head of the Tehzeeb Foundation which is dedicated to the preservation and promotion of Indian classical music – a tradition that is shared by India and Pakistan – and his projects include musicians from both sides of the border as well as those based in the worldwide diaspora. While the pandemic and resulting shutdown caused havoc around the world, Awan was particularly concerned for those relying on concert performances for their livelihoods and reached out to classical musicians to be digitally recorded, resulting in 38 tracks, of which the longest is just under an hour. Such crisp curating allows for a very wide range of styles, vocal as well as instrumental, with *dhrupad* (an ancient, pure classical vocal style) alongside lighter classical forms such as *thumri* and an array of instrumental solos featuring *sitar*, *sarangi*, *bansuri* (bamboo flute) violin and *tabla* solos. The album features a huge number of *ragas* and numerous musicians, many of whom would be unknown to Western audiences as would some rarely heard folk instruments such as the *alghoza* (a double-beaked flute), used in the folk music of Sindh, Balochistan and Rajasthan, and the Afghan *rubab* and a kind of banjo modified in Balochistan from Japan's *taishōgoto*.

Fans of Indian classical and folk music are sure to be delighted with *Music in Covid Times,* which is presented as a slick box set containing a micro-USB and a hardcover book with detailed notes about the music and musicians. There is also a video version available on YouTube, complete with dancers on stage. A veritable feast for the senses.

*JAMEELA SIDDIQI*

TRACK TO TRY *Sur Momal Rano* by Akbar Khamiso

Sushma Soma

Ziya Tabassian

## M Mashabi & His Kelana Ria Orchestra
Kafilah Nights: Malay-Arabic Variations from 1960s Indonesia

Elevation Records

★★★★½

This collection is a precious insight into the music scene of 1960s Indonesia. Formed by Adi Karso and Munif Bahasuan, Kelana Ria was among the most popular Malay orchestras of the time. Their music was rooted in *orkes Melayu*, a genre in which Malay-language songs are brought to life by lively ensembles of mainly Western instruments.

From the first track, one is struck by the sublime vocals of the group's lead singer, Muhamad Mashabi. His versatile voice captures a great variety of moods. 'Renungkanlah (Think About It)' is a love song with a joyous melody while 'Ratapan Anak Tiri (Lament of a Stepchild)' evokes heartbreaking melancholia.

The songs are underpinned with diverse instrumentation including piano, percussion, bass and bamboo flute. A mandolin and accordion often imitate Mashabi's vocal melodies, making for a beautiful interplay between voice and instrument. Kelana Ria's compositions display influences from Indian film music to Arabic ensembles. The presence of rumba and tango rhythms give certain songs a distinctively Latin feel and the *rasgueado* strumming in 'Pesta Tjahaja (Festival of Light)' brings flamenco to mind. Indeed, Kelana Ria's ability to pack so much emotion and rich texture into two to three minute songs make this a standout listen.

*SHUKRI HABIB ALI*

TRACK TO TRY *Renungkanlah (Think About It)*

## Malayeen
Malayeen

Discrepant

★★★★½

Inspired by a love for the work of trailblazing Egyptian guitarist Omar Khorshid, Lebanese trio Malayeen employed a similarly bold approach to modernising traditional strains of Arabic music on their 2014 self-titled debut album. It now receives a vinyl repress. Khorshid's influence is made explicit on namesake opener 'Omar', which sees electric guitar player Charbel Haber pay stylistic tribute to the master's twanged Middle Eastern melodies. The exuberant 'Najwa' (named, like the album's other tracks, for a legendary Egyptian belly dancer) offsets Arabic dance rhythms, organs and guitars with subtle electronics.

Elsewhere, the trio's experimental roots take centre stage. 'Nadia'. for instance, clouds Haber's guitar twangs in swirls of electronic glitch rhythms and digital bleeps. The epic, near 18-minute 'Samia', meanwhile, pairs electronically treated accordion runs and the buzz of Middle Eastern synth harmonies with the slow drone of Kosmische-style rock guitars and the hypnotic barrelled rhythms of Khaled Yassine's *darbouka* drums to create something headily atmospheric.

*PAUL BOWLER*

TRACK TO TRY *Najwa*

## Sababa 5
Aspan

Batov Records

★★★½☆

For their second album, Tel Aviv-based instrumental group Sababa 5 move away from the rather self-conscious pan-global hotchpotch that characterised their 2022 self-titled debut to pursue a sound that combines Middle Eastern-flavoured grooves with some of the exploratory impulses of vintage progressive rock and psychedelia. A little bit of focus goes a long way: the result is a lot more compelling.

Yet, even while they're finding their own sound, a vibe this retro invites comparisons. Opening track, 'Wembley', sounds like mid-70s Yes playing the stadium on a balmy afternoon, with Steve Howe plugging in an electric *saz*. 'Tri Li Li' is a laid-back, synth-drenched vamp in the classic Anadolu-style of 2023-era Barış Manço. The tremendous, organ-driven title-track is a nocturnal jazz-rock jam with more than a hint of The Doors' 'Light My Fire'. 'Alpis' is a bullish stomp summoning krautrockers Can in their most motorik moments.

Sababa 5 are a tight-knit unit, crafting faultlessly immaculate jams. But the album belongs to keyboardist Eitan Drabkin who displays a Joe Zawinul-esque ability to wring a plethora of juicy sounds from the keys, from wigged-out Moog solos and trippy, dubwise organ to the shushing of synth waves crashing on a far-flung cosmic shoreline.

*DANIEL SPICER*

TRACK TO TRY *Aspan*

## Ziya Tabassian
Remembrances

Ziya Tabassian

★★★★½

On his previous album, 2020's *Zarb-e Osul*, Montreal-based percussionist Ziya Tabassian demonstrated his mastery of ancient Persian rhythmic cycles known as *osul*, as well as his ability to craft engaging and intricate percussive compositions within those cycles. On this latest collection of original works, Tabassian imbues his complex rhythmic structures with melody, orchestrated for an ensemble of bowed and plucked strings, with occasional wind and pitched percussion. Traditional instruments from across the Middle East – *oud*, *kanun*, *tar*, *kamancheh* and *duduk* – are blended with Western violin and cello, as well as the surprising and welcome addition of marimba, all held together by Tabassian's diverse array of percussion layers.

Improvisation is kept to a minimum, in favour of through-composed unison melodies, though there are moments where individual musicians are allowed space to add their own voice – Didem Başar's plaintive kanun solo at the start of 'Vazin' is a particular highlight. This latter piece is emblematic of Tabassian's extensive early music background, with the ensemble being bolstered by *viola da gamba* and European lute, in a composition that seamlessly combines Persian time cycles with a Baroque harmonic language.

Melodically strong, texturally rich and rhythmically ornate, *Remembrances* is a sophisticated set of compositions that evokes tradition, while also cementing Tabassian as a composer and musician with a vital and singular voice.

*CHARLIE CAWOOD*

TRACK TO TRY *Lovebird*

Noushin Bahr

# Fusion REVIEWS

## A08
### Waiting for Zion
Compost Records

★★★☆☆

After an album and a handful of EPs, the duo Africaine 808 marks a step forward after a ten-year career by becoming A08. New name, new music. While their taste for experimentation remains deeply rooted, Dirk Leyers and DJ Nomad are shaking up their magic formula of disco and West African rhythms; a recipe that made them famous, especially with their remixes for Tony Allen, Amadou & Mariam and Pasteur Lappé. On *Waiting for Zion*, the Germans upset this balance by attaching more importance to electronica. Whereas the ethereal Afrobeat introduction sounds reassuring, the album moves towards a lo-fi digital dub and tries out unexpected fusions, at the risk of bewildering the listener. Old-school Detroit beats are warmed up at the last moment by some highlife melodies. Then, lost in a cold-wave atmosphere, we are awakened by a funky and organic house piece. The reference to Zion becomes obvious due to the psychedelic reggae vibes, which add another layer of influences to the album, adding to Caribbean music and jazz, trademark of their label, Compost. Surrounded by musicians from Colombia, Ghana, Kenya, Trinidad and Germany, A08 are looking for a new beginning on an album that is seductive, though too rich in ideas to be thrilling.

*FRANÇOIS RENONCOURT*

TRACK TO TRY *Big City Blues*

TOP OF THE WORLD

## Tamsin Elliott & Tarek Elazhary
### So Far We Have Come
Penny Fiddle Records

★★★★☆

English multi-instrumentalist Elliott teams up with Egyptian *oud* player Elazhary on this absorbing and beautiful set combining the folk cultures of both countries. Elliott met Elazhary while in Cairo, exploring Arabic music and grazing Cairo's live music scene. The album title reflects on "the distance and barriers we have overcome to create this work together," according to Elliott. Its tracks comprise a marriage of equals between old English dance tunes and Arabic classical and folk idioms, and there are multiple crossing points between the two cultures. Opener, 'In the Grey of the Morning', samples birds and waves that spread under Archie Churchill-Moss' guitar, Daniel Gouly's clarinet, Elliott's harp and the flurry of Elazhary's oud, which strikes out powerful lead lines on the following 'El Hara', shapeshifting against Elliott's quartertone accordion. The contemplative title-track is led by Elliott's accordion, while the tune set 'The Returning Light / Late Frost' features an excellent turn from fiddler Sam Sweeney. Two improvisational *taqasim* pieces are high points. The first, 'Taqasim Nahawand' features Elliott's harp in close-up, set against a sombre string backing, while 'Taqasim Bayati' captures Elazhary's oud at its most expressive. And don't miss Egyptian singer Laila Samy's turn on 'Amy Abu El Fanous' (The Lantern Bearer). A brilliant and effective musical fusion.

*TIM CUMMING*

TRACK TO TRY *El Hara*

## Agbeko
### There Must Be Another Way
Agbeko Records

★★★★☆

Packing a punch with their post-pandemic offering, Manchester-based Agbeko's *There Must Be Another Way* is a musical declaration of their place in the industry. From the first track to the last, this 12-strong collective is honing the Afrobeat, groove, psychedelic funk and political consciousness of 1970s Western African music by giants like Fela Kuti, Orchestre Poly-Rythmo de Cotonou and Ebo Taylor. The boisterous instrumentals in 'Oscar's Tune' and 'Terra Firma' kickstart an urge to dance, while showcasing the band's musicality. The project's balance comes in songs like 'Somebody Somebody' and 'All That I'd Turn Back For' which are poignant and introspective, with lyrics by composer, clarinet and saxophonist Jamie Stockbridge (who wrote five of the six tracks alone, and co-wrote 'Oscar's Tune' with guitarist Jamie Girling). The spectacular chemistry shared by this large band is electric and emotive, and the talents of each member/instrument are well-balanced in the mix. You can imagine this music finding a home in many settings, be it an upmarket jazz lounge, a downtown New York bar or a scenic drive – it will have you grooving, singing, and inspired to protest for a better society.

*HILLARY PALESA MORUSI*

TRACK TO TRY *Terra Firma*

## Vernon Chatlein
### Imershón
AudioMaze

★★★★☆

Vernon Chatlein is a composer, theatre maker and musician from Curaçao, an island in the region of the Caribbean that was colonised by the Dutch. Having grown up listening to *tumba*, the island's Africa-derived, drum-accompanied blues-dance style, he took conga and *batá* lessons from a Cuban teacher, then learned jazz piano with the Curaçaoan jazz pianist Randal Corsen and eventually, ever curious, took a deep dive into *muzik di zumbi*, an ethereal Afro-Curaçaoan style played on instruments including flute, *gogorobi* (rattles) and the *benta* (bow harp) – which many ethnomusicology books erroneously list as extinct.

It's the latter self-made instrument with which Chatlein is photographed on the cover of *Imershón* (Immersion), his third album, and the key that unlocked his academic research into the folklore of Curaçao, aided by knowledgeable elders and an audio archive of Lomax-style field recordings made in the 50s and 60s. Old songs, stories and legends harking back to slavery are given a platform here, presented in ways raw – 'Heru (Agang)' honours the musicality in a piece of iron plow via marimba and stomping bamboo – and cross-genre ambitious. The Netherlands-based Chatlein has long collaborated with musicians from the worlds of funk, jazz, Latin jazz and classical; the work song 'Pakudo' positions the thin but mesmerising vocals of archive performer Tjodó Juliana alongside the alto sax of New Yorker Godwin Louis, who guests on 'Mi'n ta Pober' (I Ain't Poor), a colonial-era nursery rhyme lent further melodic gravitas by flute, children's chorus and the powerful voice of beloved Curaçao diva Elia Isenia. An enthralling project.

*JANE CORNWELL*

TRACK TO TRY *Mi'n ta Pober (feat Godwin Louis & Elia Isenia)*

## Rahel Giger & Moussa Cissokho
### La Pluma
Rahel Giger

★★★☆☆

It's almost impossible to categorise *La Pluma* other than to suggest it's sure to appeal to those who don't like their music to fit any pigeonhole. Like the late Lhasa de Sela and the French auteur Camille, the Swiss singer-songwriter Rahel Giger creates a maverick kind of border-defying folk-pop that refuses to recognise cultural boundaries and her teaming here with the Senegalese Moussa Cissokho, who grew up in a *griot* family, is only the start of the story. His rippling *kora* underpins Giger's sweetly haunting voice on all

Kate Griffin

Hochzeitskapelle & Japanese Friends

ten tracks as she sings in German, Spanish, Slovenian, Mandinka and the ancient Swiss language of Romansh, yet no two tracks are remotely similar. 'Madre Tierra' has a touch of Manu Chao or Amparo Sánchez about it. On 'Mi Casa', Moussa's kora is juxtaposed against warm clarinet as Giger duets wistfully with Argentinian rock-tango poet Daniel Melingo. 'Anneli' mixes jazz and folk idioms and ends up sounding like a modern madrigal as Giger harmonises with Büne Huber of chart-topping Swiss band Patent Ochsner. The album ends with the celestial 'Memoria' featuring Buddhist chants and the mesmerising voice of the Tibetan exile Loten Namling.

*NIGEL WILLIAMSON*

TRACK TO TRY *Memoria (feat Loten Namling)*

## Jono Heyes
Beehive

Asphalt Tango

★★★☆☆

Now here's a real oddity. Jono Heyes is a New Zealander who apparently lives in a gypsy wagon on the edge of the Bohemia forest in the Czech Republic, where he constructed a special studio to record a set that also includes Czech, French and Swedish musicians, and was engineered and mastered by the great Jerry Boys, who won Grammys for his work with Ali Farka Touré & Toumani Diabaté and Buena Vista offshoot projects. The result is a well-produced but curious album that combines all manner of global styles, played by a seven-piece band that includes fiddle, piano, trumpet and *gimbri* and with songs in Spanish, English, French and Sanskrit. The best track, 'Cantar la Guitarra', is a slinky and tuneful salsa dance tune, sounding like a slowed-down Buena Vista track with a jazz edge and some good piano work. Elsewhere, many of the songs are slow and atmospheric, ranging from melodic and gently charming 'Land of the Greenstone', which sounds like an old European folk tune, through to 'Citoyen', which veers between Balkan knees-up and chanson-influenced balladry, and the opening 'Mani's Eyes', which mixes growled vocals and wailing fiddles and builds up to a grand, chanting climax. Unfocussed, maybe, but certainly bold.

*ROBIN DENSELOW*

TRACK TO TRY *Cantar la Guitarra*

## Hildaland
Sule Skerry

Adhyâropa Records

★★★☆☆

The thought of a duo comprising nothing more than fiddle and mandolin made me doubtful. Surely these instruments have a similar range and, without some bassier accompaniment, could become a bit monotonous. But I needn't have worried.

Hildaland are Scottish fiddler Louise Bichan and American mandolinist Ethan Setiawan. The two met at Berklee College of Music in Boston, MA and have played together for several years as part of the band Corner House.

This is Hildaland's debut album. Influences range from old-time to Swedish-inspired music but *Sule Skerry* emphasises Bichan's Scottish roots. It's an enjoyable, varied collection of traditional and original instrumentals plus a few tracks featuring singing, notably an impressive version of Gillian Welch's 'Everything is Free'.

Setiawan adds variety by playing, among other instruments, octave mandolin, mandola and tenor guitar, and guest musicians add touches of piano, vocals, keyboards and bass.

Hildaland should appeal to fans of Nickel Creek and Sarah-Jane Summers & Juhani Silvola, while Setiawan's old-time delivery of 'Fall on My Knees' has a charm similar to Joachim Cooder's renditions of Uncle Dave Macon's songs. *Sule Skerry* demonstrates fine musicianship and a tangible sense of enjoyment.

*TONY GILLAM*

TRACK TO TRY *Trains / Fin's*

## Hochzeitskapelle & Japanese Friends
The Orchestra in the Sky

Alien Transistor

★★★★☆

Hochzeitskapelle are a German instrumental quintet comprised of musicians from the Munich Jazz scene, who have garnered a reputation for their loose and holistic approach to performance. With each member being a multi-instrumentalist, their line-up encompasses a myriad of brass instruments, banjo, harmonium, glockenspiel, viola and percussion, lending their arrangements a folksy, big band quality. *The Orchestra in the Sky* is a culmination of the group's longstanding relationship with Japanese independent and underground musicians, presented as an expansive double album recorded in both Kobe and Tokyo. Among the many collaborating artists are avant-pop band Tenniscoats, singer-songwriter Yuko Ikema, acid-folk duo Eddie Marcon and jazz woodwind player/bandleader Kanji Nakao. The soundscape of the album is as eclectic as the lineup of guests, morphing between playful big band marches, elegiac chamber orchestrations and delicate acoustic pop, all delivered with a joyful, ramshackle energy. The songs largely have an air of wistful optimism, combined with an underlying sense of bittersweet melancholy – the intimacy of the recording accentuating both the fragility and grandiosity of the arrangements. At just over two hours of music, *The Orchestra in the Sky* is an exhaustive body of work, yet stands as a comprehensive encapsulation of a multi-year cultural exchange, resulting in an album laced with beauty and humanity.

*CHARLIE CAWOOD*

TRACK TO TRY *Kaze No Uta*

## iZem
In Ze Early Morning

Elis Records

★★★☆☆

*In Ze Early Morning* is the second album of the nomadic artist iZem, who has become an expert in the art of combining the sounds, technologies and cultures he encounters while on the road. Eight years after the critically-acclaimed *Hafa*, iZem is back with nine songs distinguished by a jazzy and tropical taste, and recorded between Portugal, Brazil and France, his country of origin. Alongside a horns section influenced by Afro-Latin and Ethio-jazz, iZem wakes up with '6AM', an instrumental introduction which tells a lot about the delicacy of this whole album mainly shaped by collaborations. After working with Lusophone music legends Elza Soares and Mayra Andrade, he appears here alongside Brazilians Flavia Coelho & Luiza on 'Sua Pele', a brilliant R&B-infused song. Among other guests, the globetrotter also invites Lucas Santtana on a reggae riddim, and then enhances the sweet voice of the Portuguese Dino D'Santiago on 'Leba', before overlaying his own on Jimena Angel's throughout 'A Veces', a dubby Colombian *cumbia*. We would have loved to hear iZem blurring the line between acoustic and electronic a little more, like he did on his EP *Beni Lane*, even if the tracks 'Ochun' and '10PM' are trying to bring this interesting twist. Nothing new under the sun, but at least the sun is shining!

*FRANÇOIS RENONCOURT*

TRACK TO TRY *Sua Pele (feat Flavia Coelho & Luiza)*

## Yosef-Gutman Levitt & Omri Mor
Melodies of Light

Soul Song Records

★★★★☆

Having only recently reviewed Levitt's *Soul Song* (in #190) I was surprised and delighted to see he'd released a second album in the space of a few months. Remarkably, it transpires that *Melodies of Light* is the result of just one extra day in the studio after the recording of the previous album.

Pianist/composer Omri Mor and drummer Ofri Nehemya were encouraged to improvise and only ▸

Koji Saito

Hugh Masekela and Machel Montano

TOP OF THE WORLD

BUY NOW

## Hugh Masekela & Siparia Deltones
Siparia to Soweto

Gallo / Monk Music

★★★★½

Hugh Masekela first heard the Trinidadian steel pan orchestra the Siparia Deltones when they were opening act at the inaugural San Fernando Jazz Festival in 2005. Years before, when living in exile in London, the South African trumpeter had come across calypso and other Caribbean styles imported by the Windrush immigrants and had loved the vernacular exuberance. Yet at the time the idea of bridging the musical worlds of Africa and the Caribbean does not seem to have occurred – no doubt he already had too many other projects on the go.

However, when he heard the Siparia Deltones it suddenly seemed very obvious: Trinidad's African heritage expresses itself through the steel pan as potently as jazz and blues were the legacy of the slave plantations of America's Deep South.

The idea fermented for several years until the Deltones' band leader Akinola Sennon and musical arranger Carlton 'Zanda' Alexander met Masekela again in 2012 in St Lucia, where he was headlining the island's annual jazz festival.

They invited him to their home town of Siparia on Trinidad's southern coast and in May 2013 he spent six weeks there recording with the Deltones. After post-production work in South Africa, the release of the record was announced by Trinidad & Tobago's Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism for May 2014 with a gala ceremony in Port of Spain followed by a celebratory concert in Siparia.

For various reasons, not least Masekela's battle with the cancer that would end his life in 2018, the project mothballed. Its belated release a decade after it was recorded now makes *Siparia to Soweto* the second posthumous Masekela, following 2020's *Rejoice!* with Tony Allen.

The sound of the steel pans fills every track but it's predominantly Masekela's album as he sings and blows his burnished trumpet solos over the pulsating Afro-Caribbean rhythms. *Soca* legend Machel Montano sings on the opening track 'The Meeting Place' and several of the songs are Trinidadian standards by the likes of Lord Kitchener and Mighty Shadow – but it is 'Bra' Hugh who ties it all together with a South African township vibe, revisiting his 1980s hit version of Fela Kuti's 'Lady' in swinging style and reprising his glorious trumpet solo from 'Grazing in the Grass' almost note-for-note on 'Dis Soca is for You'.

The album ends with a nine-minute live version of the 'The Meeting Place' by the Deltones without Masekela, a symphonic storm of clattering percussion and ringing pans played with an energy that is thrilling enough on record and must have been overwhelming in person.

*NIGEL WILLIAMSON*

TRACK TO TRY *The Meeting Place*

later did jazz fusion bassist/composer Levitt add his bass parts. Levitt shaped the improvised material into fully-realised compositions and, in doing so, has co-created another album of transcendent music, this time with Mor's piano taking centre-stage.

As with the previous album, you can detect South African and Hasidic influences, even touches of Eric Satie, but also Middle Eastern and Moroccan flavours.

It would be unfair to describe this as an hour of leftovers from a recording session – it's a delicate, rich listening experience in its own right. But, for me, this is not quite as sublime as *Soul Song*. For all that, what a difference an extra day of studio time can make.

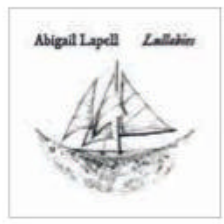
*TONY GILLAM*

TRACK TO TRY *Hamotzi*

## Abigail Lapell
Lullabies

Outside Music

★★★½☆




*Lullabies* – cradle songs – a term derived from the middle English '*lullen*' (lull) and 'bye' (near), and, much further back, the Hebrew '*Lilith-abi*' (Lilith begone) – used to scare away child-stealing Lilith from the crib. Here, on Canadian singer Lapell's album, lullabies are drawn from across the world, each embraced by the sweet spirit of sleep. We begin with the ancient French 'Isabeau', otherworldly and not without its darker depths of foreboding, a depth that underlies and sometimes frames the tunes' sweet lulling. Lapell's own 'Go to Sleep' sounds more than half familiar – perhaps indicative of many a lullaby here, each of them sharing one purpose, but each stretching out its own feel and form, whether across Yiddish 'Oyfn Pripitchek' – prominent across pre-Holocaust central Europe, embued with sadness and calm – or the Welsh 'Suo Gân', its music a corral of comfort and protection. Another Hebrew lullaby, 'Numi Numi' is lulling enough to yearn for a lie-down, while Japanese 'Lullaby of Takeda', just voice and solo guitar, is exquisite. Put it on late at night, and don't set an alarm.

*TIM CUMMING*

TRACK TO TRY *Numi Numi*

## Don Letts
Outta Sync

Cooking Vinyl

★★★★½

'*A soundtrack to my mind, with some wicked bass lines*,' is how Don Letts describes his debut album, recorded at the age of 67. And it's as impressively original as you'd expect from a man

Q&A

### Siparia Deltones' Akinola Sennon

**Can you tell us a little about the history of the Deltones?**
The Deltones [were] founded in Siparia in 1962 by the steel pan player Ellis Knights, and since then [have] grown to be one of the most successful bands in Trinidad and Tobago. Our mission is to use the steel pan as a vessel to restore the cultural heritage of Trinidad and Tobago and the Afro-Caribbean diaspora.

**How important is the African legacy in steel pan music?**
While our roots are inherently African, many other peoples and cultures have integrated into our society over time and done so in peace and harmony. *Siparia to Soweto* represents a coming together, an amalgamation of people, experiences and culture into one 'meeting place', which of course is the title of the song that opens and closes the album.

**How did Hugh Masekela fit in with the music of the Deltones?**
He adjusted perfectly to the venture. He saw the possibility to turn our collaboration into a major voice inside the world's music. *Siparia to Soweto* is an ideal showcase for our legacy to converge. It recounts the narrative of our predecessors who were taken from the shores of Africa, yet had the strength to withstand subjugation and to endure.

Che Kothari, Maria Nunes

who has played an intriguing role in the British music scene since the 70s, while constantly giving himself new challenges. A Londoner, the son of Jamaican immigrants, he was the bridge between reggae and punk, dressing punks in a Kings Road clothes shop, then turning them on to reggae as a DJ. As he explains in *Outta Sync*'s title-track '*I'm the vinyl generation and that's how I got my start, combining clothes and music 'n turning it into art.*' He's also celebrated as a video and film-maker, and formed Big Audio Dynamite with Mick Jones. All those elements are reflected here, in a set that mixes tuneful pop influences with reggae and dub, with original, personal lyrics and easy-going vocals. It's an upbeat set, with impressive, varying songs from the cheerful 'Yes' to the stomping 'Situationist (feat Zoe Devlin Love)', *sitar* playing alongside the reggae rhythm on 'Civilisation (feat Honor Letts)' and Wayne Coyne (from American psychedelic rockers The Flaming Lips) appearing on 'Present Dilemmas'.

*ROBIN DENSELOW*

TRACK TO TRY *Outta Sync*

## TaxiCab Verses
### Is What You Make It

Strolling Bones Records

★★★★½

Originally released in 2016, *Is What You Make It* is now being reissued. The project has a delightful origin story. In 2008 Jim Wilson, a musician from Athens, Georgia, travelled to Accra in Ghana where he became fascinated by West African music and intrigued by the odd, sometimes comical phrases on stickers adorning Accra's taxicabs. Wilson noted down the phrases, and immersed himself in the music, eventually meeting *atentenben* (bamboo flute) player Kofi Atentenben and his band the Warriors.

Taking lyrical inspiration from the 'taxicab verses', Wilson recorded ten tracks with Kofi & the Warriors before returning to Georgia. Further recordings were made at the Flicker Theatre in downtown Athens, adding electric guitar, bass, cello, drums, violin, saxophone and soulful backing vocals to the *djembé*, congas, xylophone and atentenben.

*Is What You Make It* is a unique Ghanian-American collaboration – the atentenben duels with the saxophone, the djembés provide a solid bedrock for the gritty guitars. There are occasional shades of Talking Heads and Mali-California fusion band Orchestra Gold. Great musicianship combined with a winning sense of playfulness.

*TONY GILLAM*

TRACK TO TRY *Be Wise, Think Twice*

## Up High Collective
### Koinonia

San-kofa Rhythm Records

★★★★½

The brainchild of producer duo Koen De Petter & Renaldo Maria, Up High Collective have existed in various forms and guises since their 2010 emergence on the global music scene. *Koinonia*, the second full-length from the Belgian-based troupe, is the follow-up to 2018's *Solitude*, but has in fact '*been in the works since 2015.*' The record sees them enlisting a new cohort of musical talent – including drummer Lander Gyselinck, and one of Belgium's few *sitar* players, Bert Cornelis – for a record that ties together samples of traditional Indian music with experimental, ambient and electronic sounds.

Opener 'Todi' sets the scene, merging shuddering sitar melodies with weighty background drones to create a murky, ambient introduction. Lead single 'Galiyon' matches analog recordings with glitching electronics and bubbling bassy percussion to grasp that anachronistic chill-out lounge sound that has become Up High Collective's calling card. Other album highlights include 'Mainhan' with its samples and loops melting into arrythmic beats and stilted strings, the sci-fi bleep-bloops of 'Utano Trio' and the eerie distortion of 'Bayanaka'. But it's the dubstep-coded silliness of 'Ahir' that really shines – an addictive mix of coiling Indian traditional motifs, crunchy percussion, and snaking synths coalescing into one huge tune. An endlessly surprising and eclectic record.

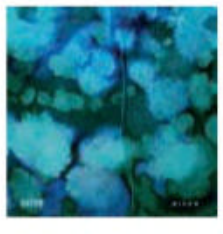
*OLIVIA CHEVES*

TRACK TO TRY *Ahir*

## Wax Machine
### The Sky Unfurls, The Dance Goes On

Batov Records

★★★½☆



Led by Brazilian-born, Italian/English-raised songwriter and singer Lau Ro, Wax Machine's third album, *The Sky Unfurls, The Dance Goes On*, includes, among others, bassist Ozzy Moysey, of Ancient Infinity Orchestra fame, Adam Campbell, as well as flautist Isobel Jones and percussionist Toma Sapir, with Marwyn Grace and Ella Russell on supporting vocals. Mostly inspired by Lau Ro's '*recently found obsession with water*,' sea and rivers, encountered during their recent trip to Brazil, the album flows gracefully between mellow melodies and improvised interplay. Currently based in Brighton, Lau Ro includes Nick Drake among their influences and certainly the music on this label brings to mind the jazz-infused folk of that great singer-songwriter. The album's nine tracks feature lush soundscapes unfurling over smooth grooves and energetic bass lines, with ample space for musicians to develop their solos, with flautist Jones often in the spotlight. The pieces featuring lyrics, like 'Glimmers', have more of a song quality, while the instrumental-only tracks are more adventurous and experimental, creatively using found sounds and electronic glitches, especially in the impressive 'Transmission'. On *The Sky Unfurls, The Dance Goes On*, Wax Machine offer a satisfying and rich aural experience, one that should appeal to a wide range of listeners.

*FRANCESCO MARTINELLI*

TRACK TO TRY *Transmission*

## Mutabaruka
### Black Attack

Ariwa

★★★★½

40 years since Mutabaruka's first studio album, and 14 years since his last, this new release from the Jamaican dub poet is just as hard-hitting as ever. Known for his (sometimes controversial) socio-political commentary and a tendency to challenge mainstream thought, Muta's declamatory vocals remain ever potent. *Black Attack* addresses subjects ranging from family life and gender equality, to colonialism and corruption within government politics. It is, in the artist's own words, an '[attack on] *all the things that are keeping Black people from progressing.*'

Mutabaruka's unwavering words are delivered with the theatrical emphasis they merit: as proclamations, sweeping in and bouncing out, or punctuating the succulent sounds of bass and drum that pulse through the album. Produced by UK-based dub master Mad Professor, the record is built on a deep bed of reggae riddims. At times these lean into a dark and moody minimalism, sending percussive hits echoing through otherworldly space. At other moments, tracks bounce along, with catchy backing vocals and playful horn lines offering an upbeat counterpoint to heavily laden lyrics. Rounded off with four instrumental dubs, this record is both socially and sonically profound, and a captivating listen on multiple levels.

*CELESTE CANTOR-STEPHENS*

TRACK TO TRY *Put It Down*

Sabriya Simon

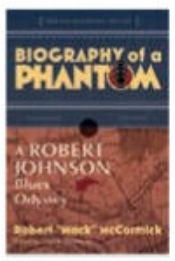
Clockwise from left: Robert 'Mack' McCormick at his typewriter; Mack's 1968 research map; Mack's copy of Robert Johnson's death certificate

## Biography of a Phantom: A Robert Johnson Blues Odyssey

Robert Mack McCormick

Smithsonian (264 pages)

★★★★☆




Hypnotised by Robert Johnson's spooked recordings of songs such as 'Cross Road Blues' and 'Hellhound on My Trail', the musicologist 'Mack' McCormick spent decades researching the hidden life and mysterious death of the man we know as the 'King of the Delta Blues.'

Johnson died – presumed murdered – in 1938 aged 27. McCormick died in 2015 at the age of 85 without ever publishing the fruits of his labours. However, his archive, containing several drafts of his manuscript for *Biography of a Phantom*, plus photos, artefacts and almost 600 reels of sound recordings, was donated to the Smithsonian, whose curator John W Troutman has now edited the manuscript with thoughtful foreword and afterword to contextualise the story.

What we get is a book that is as much about McCormick's search as it is about Johnson, and which reads like both crime thriller and musical biography. The core of McCormick's research was conducted in the Deep South during the late 1960s/early 1970s when living links to the pre-war world of Johnson were still to be found by a diligent folklorist. A vivid stylist, his prose potently describes a Delta landscape of sharecroppers' cabins and cotton fields in which he seeks to locate Johnson.

He tracks down an old girlfriend who gave birth to Johnson's son, plays Johnson's records to friends and neighbours who haven't heard his voice in more than three decades and turns up Johnson's long-lost death certificate. Then, in one of the book's most extraordinary passages, McCormick reports Johnson's supposed murder at a Greenwood dance hall to the local sheriff 32 years after the event.

After another researcher, Steve LaVere, located some of Johnson's relatives and published his findings, McCormick descended into mental illness, paranoia and jealous obsession, which is why *Biography of a Phantom* is only now appearing, half a century after it was written.

Much of the mystery surrounding Johnson will never be solved. Yet in the pages of McCormick's evocative manuscript, the phantom, whose disembodied voice on those extraordinary pre-war blues recordings still sends a shiver down the spine, begins to acquire flesh and blood.

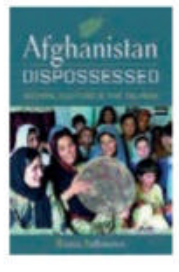
*NIGEL WILLIAMSON*

## Afghanistan Dispossessed: Women, Culture & the Taliban

Razia Sultanova

Pen & Sword (180 pages)

★★☆☆☆




This is a timely publication with the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2021. But books are many years in the making, so all the research and field work for this publication was done during the last 20 years when the country was relatively accessible. But, at least an introductory chapter was added at the last minute and suitable tweaks made in the rest of the text to bring it up to date.

Razia Sultanova grew up in Soviet Uzbekistan and, for this book, her research was primarily in Kabul, the Afghan capital, and in the northern Uzbek-speaking areas. So it is a complement to the other books on Afghan music which concentrate on the majority Pashtun and Persian cultures – the Uzbeks being the third most numerous. There's a useful chapter on the complex demography of the country.

Among the musicians Sultanova interviewed (in 2006) was Said Ghafar Kamoliddin, one of the leading Uzbek musicians favoured by the powerful (anti-Taliban) warlord General Dostum. The latter even set up live music training sessions with Kamoliddin on TV, but students, uninterested in traditional music, didn't attend. He lamented the contrast with the situation in Uzbekistan where music education flourishes.

Sultanova also quotes women on how they hate wearing the *burqa* – "like being in a cage," says one. But then she goes on to say how much she liked it and describes it as '*a charming handcraft item*,' with no sense of irony. She does admit that it was useful for hiding cameras and recording machines needed for her work. There's also a chapter on charismatic UK-based Afghan singer Elaha Soroor talking about the difficulties she faced, with threats from her family and the community at large in Afghanistan.

The subject matter is interesting, but there's a major drawback in that nobody seems to have edited it. The English is often convoluted and ungrammatical. Sometimes a word which is obviously wrong is used: '*Sufi gardening*' instead of Sufi gatherings, '*the lawn is moved*' instead of mowed, and then sentences like this about a particular song where it's hard to decipher what is being said: '*Also it based on separation or longing and 'distance' images displaying the condition of real love's logging*.' A potentially interesting study, but what a shame about the sloppy production.

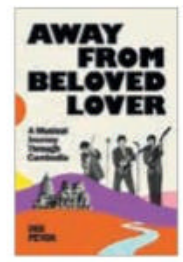
*SIMON BROUGHTON*

## Away from Beloved Lover: A Musical Journey through Cambodia

Dee Peyok

Granta (368 pages)

★★★★☆




Phnom Penh, known as the 'Pearl of the Orient' boasted a lively music culture during the 1960s and early 1970s, on par with Bangkok, Saigon and Jakarta. It was a golden era of popular music where, author Dee Peyok says, '*the music of East and West merged across Southeast Asia to the most fascinating mélange of instruments, attitudes and expressionism*.'

Spurred by early cassettes of Cambodian pop music like *Cambodian Rocks*, various labels and bands like San Diego-based Dengue Fever and Australian-Khmer group Cambodian Space Project, Dee Peyok moved to Cambodia with her English teacher partner and began searching for musical survivors of the genocidal Khmer Rouge across the country. The resultant *Away from Beloved Lover* is a history of popular music in the form of a travelogue, which makes for an interesting read.

Peyok surveys Cambodian music in the early chapters, from the dancing Apsaras at Angkor Wat to composer, bandleader and singer Sinn Sisamouth, the country's first guitar band Baksey Cham Krong, and singers who were murdered such as Pen Ran and Ros Sereysothea. She then takes off on a motorcycle to seek out great musicians like *chapei* (long-necked lute) master Kong Nay.

The book ends with a reality check as the author attends the final stages of the Khmer Rouge tribunal in Phnom Penh, concluding that she has experienced, '*at first hand, the healing power of music*.'

*JOHN CLEWLEY*

Courtesy of Susannah Nix from the Robert 'Mack' McCormick Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History

Bishi with City of London Sinfonia

## City of London Sinfonia with Bishi: Terry Riley In C

*Kings Place, London, October 29*

Kings Place was the perfect setting for a mesmerising collaboration between City of London Sinfonia and Bishi Bhattacharya, the London-born multi-instrumentalist, composer and producer of Bengali heritage. Trained in both Hindustani and Western classical styles, Bishi studied under *sitar* master Gaurav Mazumdar, '*a senior disciple of Ravi Shankar*,' and has since worked with Jarvis Cocker, Sean Ono Lennon and Tony Visconti. In a gold lamé cape and red platform heels, her contrast with the black-clad CLS musicians, led on violin by Alexandra Wood, couldn't be more dramatic, and added to an already bristling sense of expectation. Playing her trademark electric sitar whilst demonstrating her four-octave vocal range, Bishi opened the programme with 'Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep', a harmonic setting of a poem by Clare Harner but harmonically inspired by Bishi's time training in a Bulgarian choir and vocal workshops with American composer Meredith Monk. 'Good Immigrant' followed, based on an anthology of works by BAME writers about race & identity in contemporary Britain. The highlight, to close, was an uplifting rendition of Terry Riley's 'In C', in which CLS and Bishi, complementing each other, sent out syncopated sparks of sound into the perfect acoustics of a packed, spellbound auditorium.

*RUSSELL HIGHAM*

## An 80th Birthday Concert for Bert Jansch

*Royal Festival Hall, London, November 4*

Ten years after the Southbank's first tribute to the Pentangle legend, the Royal Festival Hall set the stage for a tightly-run multi-artist evening studded with highpoints, and segued by Stewart Lee's typically droll and enjoyably insulting introductions. Jacquie McShee opened in fine voice with 1968's 'I Got a Feeling', its tune derived from Miles Davis' 'So What'. A dream guitar duo of Martin Simpson & Louis Campbell wove magic across Davey Graham's 'Anji' and Jackson C Frank's 'Blues Run the Game', while Irish singer Brigid Mae Power delivered a full, rich vocal on 'She Moved Through the Fair' – an especially macabre but popular choice of wedding song – and Bernard Butler strapped on an echo-laden electric for 'Poison' and 'Fresh as a Sweet Sunday Morning', delivering woozy, abstract expressionist blues. James Yorkston, Jon Thorne and singer Ranjana Ghatak's brief set featured stage technicians scrabbling around in a choreography of cabling that rather suited the tale of a female highwayman testing her lover's mettle on 'Sovay', while to close the first half, Robert Plant and his excellent band Saving Grace tackled 'It Don't Bother Me' and a fabulous 'As I Rove Out'. For the second half, Sam Lee stunned us with a spare, bare unaccompanied 'Blackwaterside', while Butler and the *80 Plays* ensemble, featuring five well-travelled Gibson guitars, was arrestingly singular, as was drummer/percussionist Sarathy Korwar's propulsive jazz fusion workout across 'Osprey' and 'The Black Swan'. Kathryn Williams returned us to more conventional singer-songwriter fair on 'Needle of Death', while Robert Plant's haunting 'Go Your Own Way' helped draw the evening to a close, with everyone on stage playing 'Strolling Down the Highway' in shimmery, slightly otherworldly unison.

*TIM CUMMING*

## Silkroad Ensemble

*Bing Concert Hall, Stanford, US, November 15*

My cultural and musicological mindset has long had me rallying behind roots music and wary of fusion. Attending a live performance of the Silkroad Ensemble and its artistic director of three years, Rhiannon Giddens, had me stashing my scepticism and standing up and clapping with the rest of the grateful audience. Giddens, who played fiddle, sang and helped arrange this program, is demonstrably evolving Silkroad while keeping to the multicultural mission established by founder Yo-Yo Ma in 1998. She dubbed her premiere touring project *American Railroad*, focusing on '*Indigenous and African Americans as well as Irish, Chinese, Japanese, and other immigrant laborers whose contributions* [to the construction of the US' Transcontinental Railroad] *have been largely erased from history*.' The above ethnicities and more were represented by the musicians on this tour, as were their musical traditions, in unexpected combinations. On 'Far Down Far', for instance, Wu Man, on Chinese *pipa*, moved through several themes, some identifiably Celtic. Large-scale projections behind the players enhanced the storytelling, shifting from historical photos of African-American railroad workers to images from the *Book of Kells*. The eclectic programming was alluring rather than gimmicky, moving from elements of Indigenous Lakota to Chinese folk song to African-based blues and beyond. Some compositions deployed the 13-person ensemble at an almost orchestral dynamic, while others served as stunning solo showcases for *tabla* and *konnakol* (Karnatic vocal percussion) or powerful Japanese vocals and percussion. The evening evidenced impressive playing, an exhaustive three years of musicological research (half the time it took to build that railroad), and assiduous rehearsals resulting in meticulous coordination, even in periods of apparently free-form improvisation. The Silkroad Ensemble's mission has extended to workshops and performances in schools and prisons along their tour. This is global harmony.

*JEFF KALISS*

Silkroad Ensemble

Suzi Corker, Matthe TW Huang

MY WORLD

# Ben Edge

The British artist was all at sea until he came across a druid ceremony which ignited his art and set him off on a new path as a documentarian. "It made me re-plug myself back into humanity," he tells ***Russ Slater Johnson***

"I was going through a transitional period," Ben Edge tells me, sharing the moment in 2016 which changed the course of his life. "I was a bit lost. I was doing some work around London, [looking at the] different folklore of London, but I wasn't really sure what I was doing. Then I went to the Tower of London as I was interested in doing a portrait of the Ravenmaster and on my way there to try and approach him, as I came out of Tower Hill station, I noticed a line of people in white gowns in the distance and ran up. It was a druid ceremony taking place. I describe it now as a druidic epiphany, because it awoke something within me that started an obsession."

Prior to that, Edge had submitted a painting shortly after finishing art school, in 2009, for the BP Portrait Award. His portrait, *The Animal Handler*, was of his grandfather, a porter at Smithfield Meat Market who was an animal handler in his spare time. It was selected for exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery. After that initial success, Edge began to lose his way. "I had it in my head that I was going to spend my 20s developing a style and not really worry about exhibiting, and working all kinds of crap jobs, but looking back, once I'd got to the end of my 20s, I'd been through quite a bout of depression. I'd become disconnected to myself and disconnected to some kind of purpose bigger than everyday worries." On New Year's Day 2016 he got a phone call saying that he was no longer needed for his latest job and he decided the time was right to become a full-time artist. Then, he met the druids and their Spring Equinox ceremony on Tower Hill. "A world of seasonal folk customs opened up to me," he remembers. "There was something about that moment and then discovering seasonal customs that made me re-plug myself back into humanity, back into nature and all the bigger things that help you remember, you know, what we are."

From then on, he began documenting Britain's folk customs, both in his artwork and through filming them, becoming an unexpected documentarian in the process. "I started filming stuff on my iPhone and sending it to my wife, saying 'look at this,' and she enjoyed the footage. Then I started putting it on Instagram, and people started responding to it. I realised there was a power to this footage." However, without thinking how the films would be used he recorded it all ad hoc in portrait on his phone. Then Doc Rowe, a famous documenter of British folklore had a word: "One day he just said, 'for God's sake, turn the phone round, film landscape, because you're getting some stuff here.'"

Edge went to see the Burryman in South Queensferry, Scotland, the Summer Equinox at Stonehenge, the Hallaton Hare Pie Scramble in Leicestershire, the Straw Bear of Whittlesea, Mari Lwyd in South Wales… he documented 20 British folk customs, creating a portrait of each, with additional film footage. He dubbed this work *Frontline Folklore* and it was featured at the exhibition *Ritual Britain*, a collaboration with Simon Costin from the Museum of British Folklore, that took place in London's Crypt Gallery in 2019. Comedian Bridget Christie, Edge says, went to the exhibition four times. She ended up writing a column on it for *The Guardian*, in which she concluded: '*I was expecting to love this exhibition. I wasn't expecting to leave it feeling proud to be British.*' Christie later asked Edge to be Folklore Consultant for her Channel 4 comedy, *The Change*, which aired earlier this year.

By this time, Edge had become ensconced in British folk music. He'd arrived at it through punk, which he discovered in the late 90s. "When I was about 13, I saw a Sex Pistols record in a shop window and just bought it," he remembers. "I got obsessed with trying to listen to every punk record ever made from the late 70s." Surprisingly, this created a bridge into folk music. "Billy Childish was a big early influence, he made an album called *At the Bridge* as Billy Childish with the Singing Loins. That record blew my mind, it's this kind of raw folk, early raw folk. I also got into Patrick Fitzgerald, who played acoustic and sang punk songs. He had a song called 'Safety Pin Stuck in My Heart'… It's fantastic. From there I got into raw music, reggae, ska… punk was my original thing, but that fed into folk, and I see them both as kinds of folk music to be honest."

**"Punk was my original thing, but that fed into folk, and I see them both as kinds of folk music to be honest"**

"I was really into Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan, then with the British scene I got into the more traditional-sounding folk… I remember hearing [Shirley Collins' *Lodestar*] and it was another mind-blowing album, still one of my favourites to this day. Then The Unthanks' 'Magpie' song has that droney folk sound I love, and opened the door into other things." Edge is also a musician and his own musical journey follows this road of discovery. One of his first bands was Thee Spivs, late 70s British punk with punchy hook-laden fistfuls of vitriol, then came Ben Edge & The Electric Pencils, incorporating more nuanced influences, from avant-folk comic-book artist Jeffrey Lewis (who Edge states is "the greatest living lyricist") to The Kinks and The Cramps. 2019's *New Tradition* came later; released under his own name, it showed Edge's love of folk through a switch to acoustic guitar, a love that has gone hand-in-hand with his research into British rituals. "What really inspired me was a song about the Burryman by Daniel Patrick Quinn where he got a local to tell the story of the Burryman over this incredible droney violin. That sparked something."

For his next project, *Children of Albion*, Edge will combine a series of paintings, a film and an album, which will include contributions from Angeline Morrison, Elspeth Anne and Kathryn Roberts Parker ("a specialist in medieval instruments"). "I don't know how or when they'll all come out, or how they'll sit side by side, but it's all influenced by each other, so I'm kind of bouncing ideas," he says. He's also still promoting *Frontline Folklore*, now available as a documentary, which he will be screening in London on December 15, with Bridget Christie leading a discussion, and which he will then make available online for free from January 1, 2024. Edge has not only plugged himself back into humanity and nature, he's found a community, and his place within it. ◆

**+ LISTEN** *Daniel Patrick Quinn's 'The Burryman (feat Duncan Grahl)' appears on this issue's covermount CD, track 15*

Sylvie Tata; Ben Edge

Below (L-R): *Boss Morris at Spring Equinox* (2023); *In My Nature (Self Portrait As The Green Man)* (2021)

## BEN EDGE'S MY WORLD SELECTION

Billy Childish with the Singing Loins 'I Don't Like The Man That I Am'
Shirley Collins – *Lodestar*
Patrick Fitzgerald 'Safety Pin Stuck in My Heart'
The Unthanks 'Magpie'
Jeffrey Lewis – *12 Crass Songs*
Daniel Patrick Quinn 'The Burryman (feat Duncan Grahl)'

# Mark O'Connor

The undeniable fiddle prodigy's recording career started at just 12, with 45 albums, many Grammys and star-studded collaborations to come. "It's an American music story," hears ***Alexandra Petropoulos***

A young boy infatuated with fiddle music is handed an unsightly white fiddle that was once a stringless barn wall decoration; the instrument is a freak of nature, with an unbelievable resonance and the boy goes on to win just about every fiddle competition, break every record, and become one of the American tradition's most influential musicians. You'd be forgiven for assuming that somewhere along the line a contract had been drafted and the boy was down one soul.

But this isn't a great American tall tale. It is the very real but equally fantastic story of fiddle legend Mark O'Connor. It's a story of a boy who shaped his life around the American tradition not only for the love of the music but as a refuge from the knocks of life. In turn, that tradition shaped itself around him.

It all began when an eight-year-old O'Connor caught a performance by Cajun fiddler Doug Kershaw on *The Johnny Cash Show*. He was captivated by the unassuming instrument. Having already begun playing music on classical guitar, he begged his parents for a fiddle for years – he even went so far as to make his own instrument out of cardboard, coloured in with crayons.

Finally his mum bought him a fiddle at the age of 11 and he was off. It wasn't long before he attracted the attention of Texas fiddler Benny Thomasson, who took him under his wing, even giving him that infamous white fiddle. "For two years, I got the foundation of American music from an authentic legend teaching me how to play in a way that honours his tradition," O'Connor says. Sometimes Thomasson would spend a whole weekend teaching O'Connor tunes, already asking him to come up with his own variations. "In the very beginning, I was living Bennie's life. But very soon he turned it back to me. That was the genius of what he did. He realised I had this creative, rebellious bent, that I was determined to be an individual, and he fed that. By the time I was 12, almost no one could tell that he was my teacher because every fiddle tune I played was my own rendition."

O'Connor would go on to wow the American roots scene. He swept the national fiddle contests, starting in the junior categories, but quickly he was winning against established old timers as a teenager and earning a lot of 'youngest' records – the youngest National Junior Old-Time Fiddlers Contest winner (age 12), the youngest artist to ever sign to Rounder Records (12), the youngest Grand Masters Fiddle Champion (13), the youngest competitor (16) and winner (17) of the National Old-time Fiddlers' Contest in Weiser...

John David Pittman, O'Connor Collection

While child prodigies are becoming more and more prevalent in the American tradition, in the 1970s they were positively unheard of. "American roots music has always historically been an old man's environment… Nowhere in this environment was a child going toe-to-toe with these people in the competitions." He smiles. "Until I did it." At its very core folk music draws upon lived experience, but this is something O'Connor credits Thomasson for passing on. "In many cases, it would take many years to establish an authenticity in your music, to have something to say. He shaped my universe into an authentic fiddler's."

All of this is presented in O'Connor's recently published autobiography *Crossing Bridges*. It's a hefty tome, running at over 400 pages and only outlines his life from age eight to 21. It sets the rumours right and, through hundreds of amusing anecdotes, charts the story of a child prodigy who helped change the traditional scene.

> "[Thomasson] realised I had this creative, rebellious bent, that I was determined to be an individual, and he fed that"

By 1973 the 12-year-old O'Connor had made his Grand Ole Opry debut and was signed to Rounder Records, where he released five records including *Pickin' in the Wind*, *Markology* and *Soppin' in the Gravy*, before turning 20. While he's known primarily as a fiddler, O'Connor spent his teens also learning and mastering banjo, guitar and mandolin.

He picked up his first Grammy in 1991 (Best Country Instrumental Performance for *The New Nashville Cats*), and after his chart-topping 1996 album *Appalachia Waltz* on Sony Classical with Yo-Yo Ma and double bassist Edgar Meyer got snubbed by the classical world, the trio picked up a Grammy for their follow-up *Appalachian Journey*. Then in 2016 he bagged his third Grammy for *Coming Home*, featuring his wife Maggie and son Forrest.

Perhaps most fascinating in his extensive discography (running at a cool 45 albums) is *Heroes* (1993), which saw him play duets alongside all his childhood fiddle heroes including Thomasson, Jean-Luc Ponty, Stéphane Grappelli and, the man who inspired it all, Doug Kershaw.

Somehow, between all the albums and awards, O'Connor also managed to develop his O'Connor Method, an approach to string pedagogy based in the American tradition. The method stresses the importance of teaching both technique and creativity (including improvisation) at the same time from the very beginning, mimicking his own musical upbringing. His love for the tunes is clear – there are no 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' throw-aways here. Each tune a student learns, starting with the well-known 'Boil 'em Cabbage Down', is a valuable piece of the tradition, many of them O'Connor still performs today, including on his recent *Crossing Bridges* tour with Maggie.

In fact, 'Sally Goodin", passed down to the young O'Connor by Thomasson all those years ago, has become one of his go-to tunes and got a very special performance during the tour. "Maggie would bring out the white fiddle at the end of the show. We'd turn off the microphones and I'd play 'Sally Goodin" at the front of the stage so people could hear how it projects like a Stradivarius… it's so resonant. It's just a freak of nature instrument."

Whether there's something supernatural about that mythic white fiddle or not, it has seen O'Connor through a remarkable journey. "It's other people's story now," O'Connor says of his autobiography. "It started out as such a unique story that needed to be told, but now that it's published, I really do feel it's other people's story. It's an American music story." ◆

O'Connor's Grand Ole Opry debut with Roy Acuff

O'Connor with his teacher Benny Thomasson

**+ READ** *Crossing Bridges is available now from markoconnor.com*

**+ LISTEN** *'Verbovaya Doschechka (A Ukrainian Folk Song)' is on this issue's covermount CD, track 14*

## BEST ALBUMS

***4 Time National Junior Fiddle Champion***
(Rounder, 1975)
The album that started it all, recorded a day shy of his 13th birthday. It's full of Texas-style fiddle tunes and opens with 'Dusty Miller', which he learned from Benny Thomasson.

***Soppin' the Gravy***
(Rounder, 1979)
A collection of more Texas fiddle tunes that O'Connor had been playing on the competition circuit and featuring his mythic white fiddle on the cover. It also features one of his first compositions, 'Misty Moonlight Waltz'.

***Heroes***
(Warner Records, 1993)
It's easy to imagine how much fun this album must have been to record – a fiddle fanatic finally getting the chance to play with all his idols after proving his mettle. There's the delightfully tongue-in-cheek version of 'The Devil Comes Back to Georgia (feat Johnny Cash, Marty Stuart and Travis Tritt)' and bouncy 'This Can't Be Love' with Stéphane Grappelli.

**Yo-Yo Ma, Edgar Meyer & Mark O'Connor**
***Appalachia Waltz***
(Sony Classical, 1996)
The first classical-folk crossover from the illustrious trio. These are three masters of their instruments and that really shines in the music on display. 'Druid Fluid' is a fabulous hoe-down and 'F.C.'s Jig' showcases fleet fingers!

**O'Connor Band**
***Coming Home***
(Rounder Records, 2016)
The Grammy-winning debut album of the O'Connor family project with wife Maggie and son Forrest. A particular standout is the Bill Monroe tune 'Jerusalem Ridge'.

## IF YOU LIKE MARK O'CONNOR, THEN TRY…

***Mighty Poplar***
(Free Dirt Records, 2023)
Young prodigies in the folk scene were nearly unheard of when O'Connor wowed crowds in the 70s, but the scene is now rife with young, gifted players. While they're all established musicians now, bluegrass supergroup Mighty Poplar's Noam Pilkney, Chris Eldrige and Greg Garrison of Punch Brothers fame, mandolinist Andrew Marlin and fiddler Alex Hargreaves – were part of that new wave of prodigies. Long may the trend continue!

# NEW ALBUM

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# Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

**Jenna Mackle** heads to Rio and finds that samba has evolved to become a revolutionary beacon of inclusivity

It's 2am and PedeTeresa, an active band on Rio's samba scene, have just taken a break before beginning their third set at Samba do Guimarães. Nestled on a hill in Santa Teresa, a bohemian, hilltop neighbourhood overlooking all of Rio de Janeiro, Samba do Guimarães is just one of many places to experience live *roda de samba* (samba performed by a small group, normally acoustically and sat in a circle, a *roda*). Looking around, it's difficult not to be moved by what I've just experienced: the raw emotion portrayed on each person's face while they devotedly sang every word back to the band. Any doubts I had of samba's importance in modern-day Brazil have been dispelled. Samba lives on in Rio.

PedeTeresa play at Praça Tiradentes

Samba certainly has gone through many changes since it first began in the 20th century. Born out of slavery, samba was the musical expression of poverty-stricken Afro-Brazilian neighbourhoods in Rio de Janeiro. Eventually, it came to be known as the musical accompaniment to what Rio has become world-renowned for: *Carnaval*. Although samba is now considered the cultural symbol of national identity for many in Brazil, long-standing and historical difficulties related to race, class and commercialism are still experienced in relation to the genre. Wanderso Luna of PedeTeresa tells me: "There is a structural racism that prevents samba from growing as a musical genre, its consumption is hampered, it is not played on the radio, it is rarely seen on TV and yet, it is the national musical genre, known by the world to generate the largest party: carnival."

Despite these structural conflicts, samba is still the beating heart of Rio de Janeiro's culture. Marcelo Amorim Tomaz, one of the owners of renowned samba bar Beco Do Rato, in the downtown district of Lapa, discusses the importance of samba events in everyday Rio life: "Even if people are facing problems, they can come here to listen to joyful music. Samba gives people a *respiro* [break]." Walk down any street in Lapa and you will hear roda de samba, crowds engaging with classic songs that are far from forgotten, as Wanderso Luna outlines: "Samba occurs every day of the year. It is the *Carioca* identity. It is not on radio or television, but it's in the streets, at every corner."

It's also a style of music that is evolving in the 21st century. When asked what has changed since Beco Do Rato began hosting events, Tomaz is quick to note that although the music has stayed the same, the focus on inclusivity hasn't: "There is something really important that has changed: women. 20 years ago you wouldn't see women playing samba here. The history of samba is men, men, men. I can't say that Beco Do Rato was the first to open up the space for women, but we did play a huge part."

The success of the band Samba Que Elas Querem is testament to this change. An all-female, feminist band that regularly sells out events in Rio, they are undeniable protagonists within this more inclusive samba scene. Mariana Solis tells me: "Our group is feminist at its core. We avoid singing songs of a sexist and prejudiced nature, and in some cases, we even change the lyrics, and we always prioritise the work of other women. We believe this is an important way to combat gender inequality in Brazilian society."

Marcelle Britto, a successful female samba singer, concurs: "Samba was once an extremely sexist space, even female composers would use male names, like Dona Ivone Lara. Nowadays, there are several samba movements in Rio that openly defend LGTBQ+ and anti-racist causes. This change in thinking is fundamental to our evolution."

This evolution to LGBTQ+ friendly spaces is one aspect of samba that I personally notice has changed since my last visit to Rio almost ten years ago. While attending a famous Monday-night event, *Pedra Do Sal*, I speak to many audience members about this. Mediã, a Black and LGBTQ+-identifying attendee, notes: "The LGBTQ+ community has been embraced here recently. It's very common to see the pride flag at samba events. It's a movement of resistance, so at roda de samba events, it's common to see all minorities sharing this passion of resistance against the 'big guys.' To be here with my gay friends means a lot to me. It's safe, I can laugh, dance and be me. Samba was very *machista*, but people are co-opting that now – it's a place of comfort for all minorities… Samba is the biggest symbol of resistance for us all."

The evolution of samba through the years, and its current position in modern Rio de Janeiro society shows the adaptability of it as a resistance music, one that not only continues to provide locals with an avenue to forget one's problems but to confront the social difficulties still weighing on Brazil today, while, at the same time, placing Black Brazilians at the forefront. As Wanderso Luna says: "Samba circles are one of the few spaces in our country where Black people are protagonists: this forms identity, combats racism, gives dignity, social mobility and, above all, is revolutionary." ◆

PedeTeresa

DECEMBER 2023-JANUARY 2024

# Gig Guide

Acid Arab

Guillaume Durand

## *Songlines* picks...

**Tropical Pressure Christmas Party** (Dec 16, South) Party until 3am at this earth-shaking Mount Pleasant shindig with DJ & music maestros galore

**Arab Christmas** (Jan 6, London) Joseph Tawadros and others share Christmas in the Arab world in memory of Gazan music teacher Elham Farah

**The Olllam** (Jan 25 – Feb 4, On Tour) The Irish trio, made up of legendary musicians and good friends, take their deep folk grooves on the road

**Martin Carthy & Jon Wilks** (Jan 26 & 27, Midlands) See the legendary Carthy in song and conversation with renowned folkster, Jon Wilks

**Acid Arab** (Jan 27, London) Biggest London show yet for the Parisian collective and their Eastern-flavoured party-starting dance floor wig-outs

# LONDON

**15 DEC A Celebration of Simon Emmerson with Afro Celt Soundsystem + The Imagined Village** Roundhouse; **15, 22 & 29 DEC, 5, 12 & 19 JAN Viva Cuba!** Ronnie Scott's ronniescotts.co.uk; **16 DEC Los Domingos** The Portico; **Raagi Balwant Singh** The Music Room, Wembley; **The Turbans with the London Bulgarian Choir** Grand Junction; **17 DEC Sur-EAL** Rich Mix; **The Magpies** Green Note; **18 DEC Steeleye Span** Cadogan Hall; **Bitter Blossoms** Green Note; **19 DEC Kathryn Williams + Dominie Hooper** Conway Hall; **The Wilderness Yet** The Corner House, Surbiton; **19-20 DEC Xylouris White** Cafe OTO; **20 DEC Tim Edey's Celtic Christmas** Kings Place; **23 DEC Family Ceilidh Xmas Special** The Round Chapel cutashine.co.uk; **The Young'Uns** Cecil Sharp House; **30 DEC The Legacy of Fela Kuti** Jazz Cafe thejazzcafelondon.com; **6 JAN Arab Christmas: Joseph Tawadros + Najib Coutya + others** Grand Junction; **9 JAN The GAB Trio feat Bea Asurmendi** PizzaExpress Jazz Club Soho; **10 JAN The Legend of William Onyeabor** Jazz Cafe thejazzcafelondon.com; **13 JAN Grupo Pisco Sour** The Portico; **Scottish Ensemble with Jasdeep Singh Degun** Kings Place kingsplace.co.uk; **14 JAN Ethio X-mas Special** Jazz Cafe thejazzcafelondon.com; **CubAfroBeat** Ronnie Scott's; **15 JAN Saudha: Songs of Sringrar & Seduction** Elgar Room at Royal Albert Hall royalalberthall.com; **Tamesas + Kneytsh** Green Note; **17 JAN Angrusori feat Nils Henrik Asheim & Iva Bittová** Grand Junction; **Dele Sosimi Afrobeat Orchestra** Jazz Cafe; **18 JAN The Psychedelic World of Bariş Manço** Jazz Cafe thejazzcafelondon.com; **19 JAN TootArd** Hootananny Brixton; **Mohsen Namjoo** indigo at The O2; **20 JAN Tito Nieves** Electric Brixton; **22-25 JAN UK Americana Music Week** Hackney theamauk. org; **24 JAN Reg Meuross, Suntou Susso & Cohen Braithwaite-Kilcoyne** Kings Place; **25 JAN Sarah McQuaid** Uxbridge Folk Club; **26 JAN Omar Puente Charanga Jazz Sextet** World Heart Beat Embassy Gardens; **Alasdair Roberts** The Goose is Out!; **26-27 JAN Burns Night Ceilidh** Grand Junction thenestcollective.co.uk; **27 JAN Acid Arab** Electric Brixton; **Band of Burns: Burns Night at Kings Place** Kings Place kingsplace.co.uk **28 JAN Manara** Cafe OTO; **Sivan Perwer** indigo at The O2; **31 JAN Femi Oriogun-Williams** Cecil Sharp House; **3 FEB Shkoon** KOKO; **4 FEB Béla Fleck** Cadogan Hall; **5-6 FEB KODO**

**songlines.co.uk/gig-guide All information correct at time of going to press. Email listings for print and online consideration to listings@songlines.co.uk**

Barbican; 7 FEB **Fatoumata Diawara** KOKO.

# SOUTH

15 DEC **VRï** Litton Cheney Community Hall; **An Dannsa Dub** Bomba, Exeter; **Orchestre Tout Puissant Marcel Duchamp** Cornish Bank, Falmouth; **John Kirkpatrick** Bodmin Folk Club; 16 DEC **VRï** Corfe Castle Village Hall; **John Kirkpatrick** Dartington Hall, Totnes; **The Wilderness Yet** Calstock Arts; **Narthen** Halsway Manor, Crowcombe; **Martin Green: Lighting the Dark** Wesley Memorial Church, Oxford; **Johnny Coppin Band: All on a Winter's Night** Wychwood Folk Club, Ascott-under-Wychwood; **Tropical Pressure Christmas Party w/ Raz & Afla + An Dannsa Dub** Mount Pleasant Eco Park, Porthtowan; **The Magpies** Seaford Little Theatre; 17 DEC **Melrose Quartet: A Bright New Year** Turner Sims, Southampton; **An Dannsa Dub** The Tree House, Frome; 20 DEC **Johnny Coppin Band: All on a Winter's Night** Grayshott Folk Club; 22 DEC **Christmas Dinner and Dance** Halsway Manor, Crowcombe halswaymanor.org.uk; **Janice Burns & Jon Doran** Graylingwell Chapel, Chichester; 23 DEC [two shows] **Richard Durrant's Candlelit Christmas** St Mary & St Peter's Church, Wilmington; **Janice Burns & Jon Doran** Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford; 6 JAN **The Brothers Gillespie** Folk in the Barn, Canterbury; 13 JAN **Klezmer Night: Evans, Csaranko, Buraczewska & Gräßer** Halsway Manor, Crowcombe; 18 JAN **Eliza Carthy** St Andrews, Hertford; 20 JAN **The Harp: Steph West + Irene Watt + Stacey Blythe** Halsway Manor, Crowcombe; **John Kirkpatrick** Sherfield-on-Loddon Village Hall; 21 JAN **Reg Meuross & Cohen Braithwaite-Kilcoyne** Devoran Acoustic Sessions; 27 JAN **Reg Meuross, Suntou Susso & Cohen Braithwaite-Kilcoyne** The David Hall, South Petherton; 28 JAN **Reg Meuross, Suntou Susso & Cohen Braithwaite-Kilcoyne** Topsham Folk Club; 3 FEB **KODO** The Anvil, Basingstoke.

# WALES & WEST

15 DEC **The Wilderness Yet** Downend Folk & Roots, Bristol; **Johnny Coppin Band: All on a Winter's Night** Bacon Theatre, Cheltenham; 16 DEC **Afriquoi** Trinity Centre, Bristol; 20 DEC **Richard Durrant's Candlelit Christmas** Theatr Brycheniog, Brecon; **Martin Green: Lighting the Dark** Bristol Beacon; 10 JAN **The Brothers Gillespie** The Courtyard, Hereford; 18 JAN **Kronos Quartet: Five Decades** Bristol Beacon; 30 JAN **Celtic Fiddle Festival** The Market Theatre, Ledbury; 31 JAN **Forgotten Songs and Stories** Bristol Beacon bristolbeacon.org; 6 FEB **Fatoumata Diawara** Bristol Beacon.

# MIDLANDS

15 DEC **Bella Hardy Christmas Show** Bamford Village Institute, Hope Valley; **Blackbeard's Tea Party** John Peel Centre, Stowmarket; **The Magpies** Tree House Bookshop, Kenilworth; **A Winter Union** Storey's Field Centre, Cambridge; **Melrose Quartet: A Bright New Year** Bradford Arms Folk Club, Ivetsey Bank; 16 DEC **A Winter Union** Ropery Hall, Barton-upon-Humber; **Sirishkumar Manji & Vibhaas** Norwich Arts Centre; **Steeleye Span** Corn Exchange, Ipswich; **Bitter Blossoms** The Cat Asylum, Collingham; 17 DEC **A Winter Union** Poppy Folk Club, Nottingham; **Steeleye Span** The Apex, Bury St Edmunds; 21 DEC **Janice Burns & Jon Doran** The Mayfly, Lowestoft; 5 JAN **The Wilderness Yet** Burton Folk Club, Burton-on-Trent; 17 JAN **Eliza Carthy** The Musician, Leicester; 17 JAN **Angrusori feat Nils Henrik Asheim & Iva Bittová** mac, Birmingham; 21 JAN **John Kirkpatrick** Grimsby Folk Club; 23 JAN **DakhaBrakha** Town Hall, Birmingham; 26 JAN **Martin Carthy & Jon Wilks** United Reformed Church, Kenilworth; 27 JAN **Martin Carthy & Jon Wilks** The Cut, Halesworth; 29 JAN **Celtic Fiddle Festival** The Apex, Bury St Edmunds; 1 FEB **KODO** Warwick Arts Centre.

# NORTH

15 DEC **Máire Ní Chathasaigh & Chris Newman's Celtic Christmas Strings** Helmsley Arts Centre; **Agbeko** YES, Manchester; 16 DEC **The Frost & the Boughs with Lisa Knapp** Howard Assembly Room, Leeds; 17 DEC **Bitter Blossoms** Cafe#9, Sheffield; 18 DEC **A Winter Union** The Glasshouse, Gateshead; 21 DEC **Baluji Shrivastav** Howard Assembly Room, Leeds; **KOG** Ramona, Manchester; **Eliza Carthy & Jon Boden's Wassail** The Fire Station, Sunderland; 22 DEC **The Young'Uns** Elvet Methodist Church, Durham; **Melrose Quartet: A Bright New Year** Crookes Social Club, Sheffield; 18 JAN **DakhaBrakha** Band on the Wall, Manchester; 19 JAN **Angrusori feat Nils Henrik Asheim & Iva Bittová** Band on the Wall, Manchester; 21 JAN **DakhaBrakha** Brudenell Social Club, Leeds; 25 JAN **Dustbowl Revival** Brewery Arts, Kendal; 28 JAN **The Good Lovelies** The Live Room, Saltaire; 31 JAN [1pm] **Eeshar Singh & Jeevan Singh** The Venue, Leeds FREE; **Celtic Fiddle Festival** Settle Victoria Hall; 2 FEB **Fatoumata Diawara** New Century Hall, Manchester.

# SCOTLAND

15 DEC **Talisk** Beat Generator Live, Dundee; **Tim Edey's Celtic Christmas** Glenfarg Folk Club; 16 DEC **Elephant Sessions** Glasgow Academy; **Tim Edey's Celtic Christmas** Groam House Museum, Fortrose; **Talisk** Strathpeffer Pavilion; 22 DEC **Eliza Carthy & Jon Boden's Wassail** Assembly Roxy, Edinburgh; 29 DEC **Talisk + Blazin' Fiddles** The Albert Halls, Stirling; 31 DEC **Samedia Hogmanay Tropical Soundclash** La Belle Angele, Edinburgh la-belleangele.com

# IRELAND

## (Republic & Northern)

16 DEC **Brìghde Chaimbeul with Xylouris White** The Workman's Club, Dublin; 21 DEC **Ispíní na hÉireann** The Academy, Dublin; 29 DEC **Christy Moore** Vicar Street, Dublin; 2 JAN **Christy Moore** Vicar Street, Dublin; 7 JAN **Christy Moore** Vicar Street, Dublin; 11 JAN **Christy Moore** Vicar Street, Dublin; 12 JAN **Sharon Shannon, Frances Black, & Mary Coughlan** Glór, Ennis; 17 JAN **Christy Moore** Vicar Street, Dublin; 19 JAN **Sharon Shannon, Frances Black, & Mary Coughlan** Leisureland, Galway; 20 JAN **Sharon Shannon, Frances Black, & Mary Coughlan** Landmark Hotel, Co Leitrim; 21 JAN **Sharon Shannon, Frances Black, & Mary Coughlan** Limetree Theatre, Limerick

Angrusori feat Nils Henrik Asheim & Iva Bittová

Ronald Zahumensky

# TOURS

Hedera

**The Albion Christmas Band**
*Seasonal shows from the quartet*
**15 DEC** St Edith Hall, Sevenoaks; **16 DEC** Gulbenkian, Canterbury; **17 DEC** Hitchin Folk Club; **18 DEC** Cambridge Junction; **19 DEC** The Stables, Milton Keynes; **20 DEC** Stamford Arts Centre; **21 DEC** The Roses, Tewkesbury; **22 DEC** The Haymarket, Basingstoke. *albionchristmas.co.uk*

**Jim Causley**
*A Causley Christmas!*
**15 DEC** Burton Folk Club, Burton-on-Trent; **16 DEC** Wingfield Barns; **17 DEC** Grimsby Folk Club; **18 DEC** Forest Folk, North Boarhunt; **21 DEC** Dartington Hall, Totnes; **22 DEC** Nailsea Folk Club. *jimcausley.co.uk*

**Phil Cunningham**
*And his Christmas Songbook*
**15 DEC** The Albert Halls, Stirling; **17 DEC** Music Hall, Aberdeen; **18 DEC** Eden Court, Inverness; **19 DEC** Glasgow Concert Hall; **20 DEC** Perth Concert Hall; **21-22 DEC** The Queen's Hall, Edinburgh. *philcunningham.com*

**Tommy Emmanuel**
*Supported by Molly Tuttle*
**10 JAN** Exeter Corn Exchange; **11 JAN** The Forum, Bath; **12 JAN** Cadogan Hall, London; **13 JAN** De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea; **14 JAN** Palace Theatre, Southend-on-Sea; **16 JAN** The Apex, Bury St Edmunds; **17 JAN** Lowther Pavilion, Lytham; **18 JAN** The Fire Station, Sunderland; **19 JAN** Celtic Connections, Glasgow; **21 JAN** Buxton Opera House; **23 JAN** King's Lynn Corn Exchange; **24 JAN** Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury; **25 JAN** The Alban Arena, St Albans; **26 JAN** Floral Pavilion, New Brighton; **27 JAN** Royal Hall, Harrogate. *tommyemmanuel.com*

**John Francis Flynn**
*Showcasing his TOTW album*
**12 JAN** Ulster Sports Club, Belfast; **19 JAN** Brudenell Social Club, Leeds; **20 JAN** Drygate Brewing Company, Glasgow; **21 JAN** The Caves, Edinburgh; **23 JAN** The Exchange Theatre, North Shields; **24 JAN** YES, Manchester; **25 JAN** Hare & Hounds, Birmingham; **26 JAN** Clwb Ifor Bach, Cardiff; **27 JAN** Bristol Exchange; **29 JAN** The Musician, Leicester; **30 JAN** Concorde 2, Brighton; **31 JAN** The Dome, London. *ents24.com*

**Chris Green & Sophie Matthews**
*Victorian carols and folk songs*
**15 DEC** Pound Arts, Corsham; **16 DEC** Shaftesbury Arts Centre; **17 DEC** Cheltenham Town Hall; **18 DEC** St Mary's Creative Space, Chester; **19 DEC** NCEM, York; **20 DEC** Arlington Arts, Newbury; **21 DEC** Bingley Arts Centre; **22 DEC** Kingshill House, Dursley; **23 DEC** Number 8, Pershore. *greenmatthews.co.uk*

**Hedera**
*Quintet of delicate European folk*
**19 JAN** Lighthouse, Poole; **20 JAN** Ashburton Arts Centre; **21 JAN** The Cornish Bank, Falmouth; **24 JAN** St Anne's Church, Easton; **26 JAN** [+ Tamsin Elliott] Kings Place, London; **28 JAN** Black Fen Folk Club, Cambridge; **2 FEB** Open Source Arts, Leeds; **4 FEB** Highfield Trinity Methodist Church, Sheffield. *cuculirecords.com*

**Lankum**
*Touring False Lankum*
**19 DEC** Dolans, Limerick; **21 DEC** National Opera House, Wexford; **22 DEC** Leisureland, Galway; **26 JAN** Albert Hall, Manchester; **27 JAN** Boiler Shop, Newcastle upon Tyne; **1 FEB** Bristol Beacon; **3 FEB** Barrowland Ballroom, Glasgow. *lankumdublin.com*

**Tim O'Brien & Jan Fabricius**
*Grammy-winning artist and wife*
**18 JAN** The Greystones, Sheffield; **19 JAN** The Live Room, Saltaire; **20 JAN** Chequer Mead Theatre, East Grinstead; **21 JAN** Whitstable Sessions Music Club; **23 JAN** The Lexington, London; **24 JAN** The Kitchen Garden Cafe, Birmingham; **25 JAN** Halle at St Michael's, Manchester; **26 JAN** Selby Town Hall. *timobrien.net*

**The Olllam**
*Irish folk meets Detroit psych*
**25 JAN*** Brudenell Social Club, Leeds; **26 JAN*** Band on the Wall, Manchester; **27 JAN**** Celtic Connections, Glasgow; **28 JAN*** Liverpool Arts Club; **29 JAN*** Bristol Beacon; **30 JAN*** Jazz Cafe, London; **31 JAN** Black Box, Belfast; **1 FEB** Cyprus Avenue, Cork; **3 FEB*** Guildhall, Derry; **4 FEB*** Vicar Street, Dublin. *+ Siomha; **+ RURA. *theolllam.com*

**Onipa**
*Dynamic Afrofuturistic sounds*
**15 DEC** Cowley Workers Club, Oxford; **16 DEC** The Goods Shed, Stroud; **18 JAN** Colchester Arts Centre; **19 JAN** Norwich Arts Centre; **20 JAN** Cambridge Junction. *onipa.co.uk*

**Kate Rusby**
*Carols from Yorkshire & beyond*
**16 DEC** [two shows] Town Hall, Birmingham; **17 DEC** Bristol Beacon; **18 DEC** Theatre Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham; **20 DEC** The Glasshouse, Gateshead; **21 DEC** Bridgewater Hall, Manchester. *katerusby.com*

**Shen Yun**
*Chinese performing arts troupe*
**29-31 DEC** The ICC, Birmingham; **4-6 JAN** New Theatre, Oxford; **11-14 JAN** New Victoria Theatre, Woking; **17-18 JAN** Milton Keynes Theatre; **20-23 JAN** Royal & Derngate, Northampton; **26 JAN-4 FEB** Eventim Apollo, London; **7-8 FEB** Venue Cymru, Llandudno; **10 FEB** Liverpool Empire; **13-15 FEB** SEC Armadillo, Glasgow; **20-25 FEB** The Lowry, Salford. *shenyun.com*

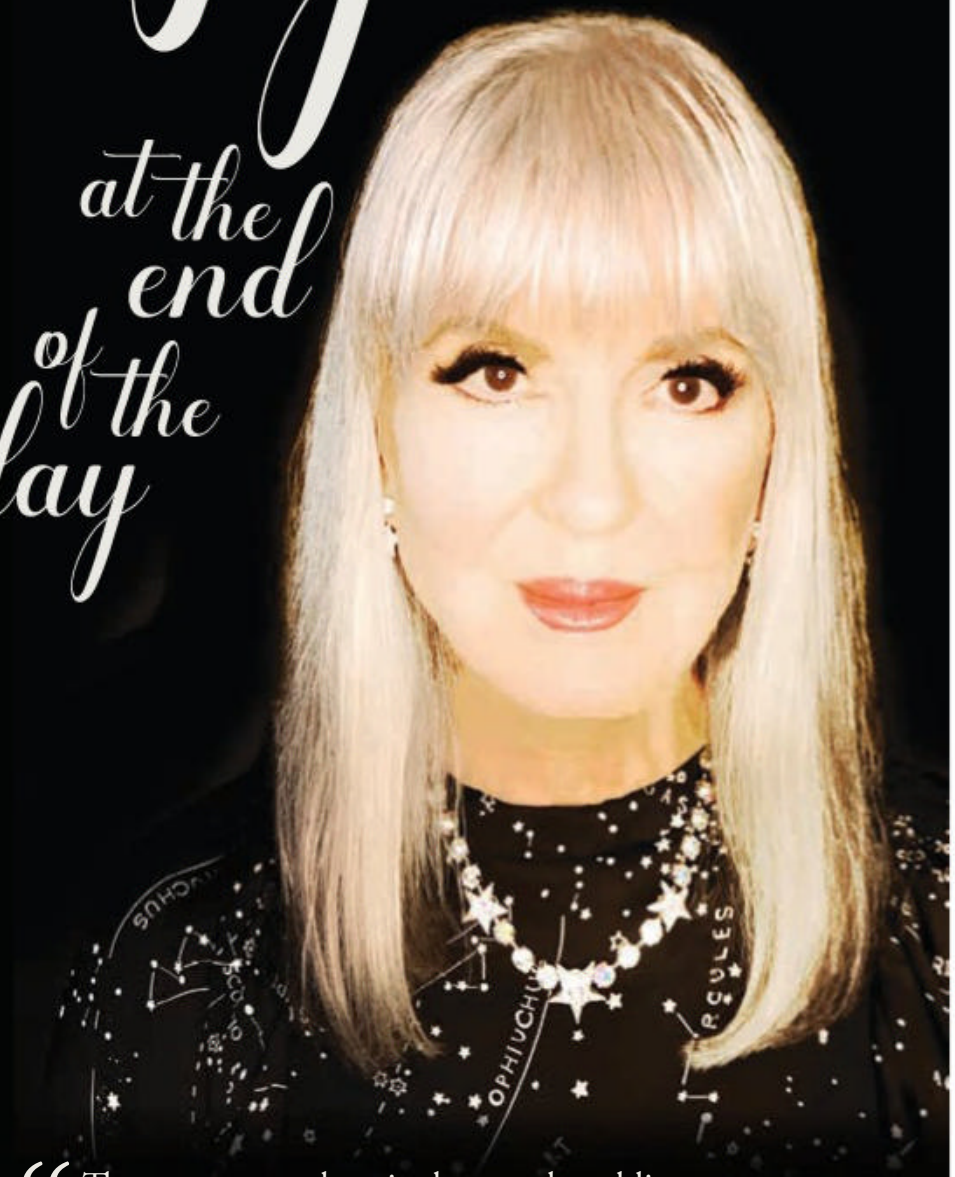
**St Agnes Fountain**
*The trio celebrates Christmas*
**15 DEC** The Watermark, Ivybridge; **16 DEC** St Agnes Methodist Church; **17 DEC** The David Hall, South Petherton; **18 DEC** The Corn Exchange, Wallingford; **19 DEC** Vestry Hall, Cranbrook; **20 DEC** Huntingdon Hall, Worcester; **21 DEC** The Met, Bury; **22 DEC** The Ropewalk, Barton-upon-Humber. *stagnesfountain.net*

**The Unthanks**
*Premiering their winter fantasia*
**15 DEC** [two shows] Hexham Abbey; **16 DEC** Usher Hall, Edinburgh; **17 DEC** [two shows] The Tung Auditorium, Liverpool; **18 DEC** Brighton Dome; **19 DEC** Corn Exchange, Cambridge; **20 DEC** Albert Hall, Manchester; **21 DEC** The Octagon Centre, Sheffield; **22 DEC** Snape Maltings. *the-unthanks.com*

Elly Lucas

# Sylvia Tyson

## at the end of the day



"The new songs, the wise heart - sheer bliss.
Thank God for Sylvia Tyson.
– *Judy Collins*

I was knocked out by "I Never Got Over You"
– *Linda Ronstadt*

*At The End Of The Day* is a fine collection of some of the most truthful and touching songs I've heard. – *Daniel Lanois*

Long may she sing! – *Margaret Atwood*

She doesn't disappoint on a single track right down to the final instrumental. Bravo Sylvia. – *Jim Cuddy of Blue Rodeo*"

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| 13 & 14 Feb **SOUTHAMPTON** Mayflower Theatre | 8 & 9 Mar **BRADFORD** Alhambra Theatre |
| 16 & 17 Feb **NOTTINGHAM** Royal Concert Hall | 12 & 13 Mar **SALFORD** The Lowry |
| 20 & 21 Feb **CANTERBURY** Marlowe Theatre | 15 & 16 Mar **WOLVERHAMPTON** Grand Theatre |
| 23 & 24 Feb **PLYMOUTH** Plymouth Theatre Royal | 19 & 20 Mar **INVERNESS** Eden Court |
| 27 & 28 Feb **BRIGHTON** Dome | 22 & 23 Mar **NORWICH** Theatre Royal |

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# ELIZA CARTHY

*Unarguably the queen of English folk*
THE OBSERVER

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| JAN 18 | HERTFORD | ST ANDREWS |
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| APR 13 | SHOREHAM | ROPETACKLE |
| APR 14 | WALTON-ON-THAMES | WALTON FOLK |
| APR 19 | BIRMINGHAM | MAC |
| APR 20 | OXFORD | NORTH WALL |
| APR 25 | LONDON | CECIL SHARP HOUSE |
| APR 26 | BRISTOL | FOLK HOUSE |
| APR 27 | SHEFFIELD | GREYSTONES |
| MAY 10 | CAMBRIDGE | STOREY'S FIELD |
| MAY 11 | ALDEBURGH | JUBILEE HALL |
| MAY 12 | LEAMINGTON SPA | TEMPERANCE |
| MAY 13 | LEAMINGTON SPA | SOLD OUT |
| MAY 17 | OTLEY | COURTHOUSE |
| MAY 18 | BARNOLDSWICK | MUSIC & ARTS |
| MAY 19 | HUTTON RUDBY | VILLAGE HALL |
| JUN 21 | SCARBOROUGH | STEPHEN JOSEPH THEATRE |
| JUN 28 | YORK | NCEM |
| JUN 29 | GATESHEAD | SAGE GATESHEAD |

JANUARY – MAY 2024

# Festival Guide

Phelimuncasi at Le Guess Who?

Tess Janssen

## REVIEW

### Le Guess Who?
**Utrecht, Netherlands**
**November 9-12**

Le Guess Who? is a shining light on the festival circuit, focused on the cutting edge of experimentalism. Now in its 16th year, the festival began in 2007 in Utrecht with over a dozen stages scattered across the city. The artists are kept under wraps until the tickets sell out (which they always do), meaning that you're entrusting the rotating roster of guest curators to keep you at the edge of your seat.

While its remit has expanded – the first edition had an all-Canadian line up, this year featured artists from over 60 countries – the basic premise of discovery remains. At his opening address Bob Van Heur, Le Guess Who?'s co-founder, reminded those present that it's all "One big question mark. Let you surprise yourself."

In true LGW spirit, then, I arrived with a dozen artists I was desperate to see, nearly all of whom I ended up missing. Instead, I followed my nose. **Maroulita de Kol**'s performance in the enchanting surroundings of the Janskerk, a restored 11th-century Romanesque church, was both meditative and melancholic: her bewitching voice breathing life into traditional Greek lullabies and original compositions about inner freedom. I was also taken aback by the verve and vitality of **Domenico Lancellotti**'s performance. Formerly of the +2's and Orquestra Imperial, his trio folded synth work into samba with joyous excursions that showcased instrumental dexterity without losing sight of the power of a great song.

There was no shortage of vital, politically charged music. Van Heur's introduction also asked us to question "what listening is in a world where people are being bombed." Perhaps the most direct answer to this question was offered by saxophonist DA Mekonnen of the duo **dragonchild x Sunken Cages** who used his 43rd birthday to powerfully call for a ceasefire in Gaza. Zambian-Canadian rapper **Backxwash** was both sensational and searing, pairing autobiographical writing with striking visuals and a pronounced sonic profile: moulding industrial metal with abrasive hip-hop as a form of catharsis.

LGW's forward-thinking agenda means it deftly swerves the dangers that a vociferously 'global' stance can bring, with some festivals perpetuating reductive narratives around the 'exotic', even when well-intentioned and seeking to preserve cultural heritage. And while one act appealed to '*primordial Senegal*' – according to their press release – the neo-colonialist legacy of the world music market of old thankfully felt far away. **Phelimuncasi** were revelatory. Taking to the stage just shy of 1am on Friday night, they channelled the energy of South African dancefloors that have propelled styles such as *gqom* – and more recently *amapiano* – to the forefront of club culture. Ugandan collective **Nihiloxica** were also on sensational form.

For a festival founded on curiosity, this lens could easily be applied in a slapdash, unfocused manner. Instead, the programming rewarded experimentation and intrepid exploration of tradition, without reducing practice to simple re-articulations of the past. Imbued with purpose, the acts I saw across the weekend asked pressing questions, challenged their audience, and – most importantly – encouraged us to think differently about what's possible when you push music to its limits.

*ALEX DE LACEY*

# LISTINGS

**Dec 27 – Jan 1, 2024**
**Woodfork Folk Festival**
*Woodford*
***woodfordfolkfestival.com***

**January 12-13**
**Folklandia**
*Helsinki, Finland*
***folklandia.fi***

**January 12-14**
**West Coast Folk Festival**
*Blackpool*
***westcoastfolkfestival.co.uk***

**January 12-14**
**Whittlesea Straw Bear Festival**
*Whittlesea*
***strawbear.org.uk***

**January 14**
**globalFEST**
*New York, US*
***globalfest.org***

**Jan 18 – Feb 4**
**Celtic Connections**
*Glasgow*
***celticconnections.com***

**January 20-21**
**Bradford Roots Music Festival**
*Bradford on Avon*
***wiltshiremusic.org.uk***

**Jan 20 – Feb 8**
**Au Fil des Voix**
*Paris, France*
***aufildesvoix.com***

**January 24-28**
**TradFest**
*Dublin, Ireland*
***tradfest.com***

**January 26-28**
**Gloucester Cajun & Zydeco Festival**
*Gloucester*
***gloucesterguildhall.co.uk***

**Jan 28 – Feb 4**
**IMBOLC Int'l Arts Festival**
*Derry*
***imbolcfestival.com***

**Feb 2-4 (Kolkata) & Feb 6-8 (Goa)**
**Sur Jahan**
*Kolkata & Goa, India*
***surjahan.com***

**February 9-11**
**Sauti za Busara**
*Zanzibar, Tanzania*
***busaramusic.org***

**February 9-11**
**Udaipur World Music Festival**
*Udaipur, India*
***udaipurworldmusicfestival.com***

**March 8-11**
**WOMADelaide**
*Adelaide, Australia*
***womadelaide.com.au***

**March 8-17**
**Klezmer Festival Fürth**
*Fürth, Germany*
***klezmer-festival.de/en***

**March 9-10**
**Pasifika Festival**
*Auckland, New Zealand*
***aucklandnz.com/pasifika***

**March 15-17**
**WOMAD NZ**
*Taranaki, New Zealand*
***womad.co.nz***

**March 21-24**
**Big Ears**
*Knoxville, TN, US*
***bigearsfestival.org***

**March 28 – April 1**
**National Folk Festival**
*Canberra, Australia*
***folkfestival.org.au***

**March 28 – April 13**
**Savannah Music Festival**
*Savannah, Georgia, US*
***savannahmusicfestival.org***

**April 11-13**
**Budapest Ritmo**
*Budapest, Hungary*
***budapestritmo.hu/en***

**April 25 – May 1**
**Costa Festival Ibiza**
*Ibiza, Spain*
***costafestival.co.uk***

**April 26-28**
**Welcome in Tziganie**
*Seissan, France*
***welcome-in-tziganie.com***

**May 2-5**
**Shetland Folk Festival**
*Shetland*
***shetlandfolkfestival.com***

**May 3-13**
**TradFest**
*Edinburgh*
***edinburghtradfest.com***

**May 4-26**
**Brighton Festival**
*Brighton*
***brightonfestival.org***

**May 10-26**
**Norfolk & Norwich Festival**
*Norfolk*
***nnfestival.org.uk***

**May 15-18**
**The Great Escape**
*Brighton*
***greatescapefestival.com***

**May 17-19**
**Festival des Musiciens du Monde**
*Montreal, Canada*
***centredesmusiciensdumonde.com***

**May 17-26**
**The Bath Festival**
*Bath, Somerset*
***bathfestivals.org.uk/the-bath-festival***

**May 23-26**
**Knockengorroch World Ceilidh**
*Knockengorroch*
***knockengorroch.org.uk***

**ALL EVENTS ARE UK UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED*

Ak Dan Gwang Chil at globalFEST 2020

# PREVIEW

## globalFEST

**WHEN: January 14**

**WHERE: New York, US**

### What the festival says:

*'globalFEST promotes global and American regional music traditions, creates opportunities for artists, inspires discovery for arts professionals to present artists from diverse cultures, and introduces new music to the public. globalFEST believes that music can be a driving force toward a society that values cultural diversity as a source of unity rather than division.'*

### What we said:

*'12 artists. Three stages. One night. That's the premise for New York City's globalFEST, one of the premier annual showcases for world and traditional music in North America. It's the antidote to 'more of the same' festivals, and always the best way to spend a cold January Sunday night in New York.'*

### Who's playing?

The initial conceit of globalFEST has changed slightly recently, with ten artists confirmed for the 2024 edition rather than 12 (which was the case for many years). However, that is no issue when the artists are of the calibre they are. It's exciting to see Thandiswa Mazwai's name present, the South African regularly featured in our pages many years ago, and it's great to see her back; Bab L' Bluz are quite rightly making a name for themselves with their Maghreb rock, and will surely put on a great show; Catalan duo Tarta Relena got themselves quite a few new fans at WOMEX with their spell-binding electronic-aided harmonies and percussion; there's a strong US Latino contingent in Yasser Tejeda, El Laberinto del Coco and The Villalobos Brothers; and there's Brazil's Bia Ferreira, *tabla* experimentalist Karsh Kale, US improv giant Lonnie Holley and Ukrainian-Canadian band Balaklava Blues rounding out a sterling selection.

**ONLINE: globalfest.org**

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Gustavo Durán composing at the piano

# Revisiting the compositions of her famous father more than 50 years since his passing, *Lucy Durán* discovers a world full of pain, love and exiled emotion

If my father, Gustavo Durán, were still alive, he would be 117 years old. Born in Barcelona in 1906, his story reads like five novels. He studied music at conservatoires in Madrid and Paris, became a composer, toured Europe at the age of 21 with his ballet for orchestra, *El Fandango del Candil* fought in the Republican Army against Franco in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), escaped on a British boat from Spain on the day the Republicans were defeated, met and married my mother at Dartington Hall, Devon, and reinvented himself in exile working for the US State Department and then, from 1946, for the UN Development Programme. He was heavily persecuted by Senator McCarthy's 'witch hunt,' accused of being a communist because he had fought in the Republican Army. The accusations and the trauma of exile took a heavy toll. He did not talk about it with me, ever. But his exquisite haiku-like songs for piano and voice, arrangements of Spanish and Latin American melodies, had their own way of communicating.

From my father I inherited a passion for music, especially music of oral tradition. My dad's nimble fingers on the piano were the soundtrack to my childhood. Wherever we were (and we moved around a lot when I was growing up), he would play his enchanting melodies, so evocative for me now. Whoever was at home – friends and family, me included – would sing along, clapping out rhythms, adding harmonies. His arrangements were understated, slightly dissonant, sometimes drone-like, melancholic and spirited. He notated them with meticulous handwriting in three unpublished notebooks, now part of his extensive archive housed in the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid.

His last UN post was in Athens, Greece, where he died in 1969, aged 62. I was devastated. I found it too painful to listen to his songs after that. They became silent, just notes on a page, buried, unpublished, rarely performed. They had formed my musical taste, but I had moved on in my adult life as a musician and musicologist, researching and recording other traditions, making radio programmes for the BBC, producing albums in Mali and Cuba, and many other places.

Then in 2019, I summoned the courage to revisit my dad's music. I felt compelled to recreate it for an event at Madrid's Instituto Cervantes to mark 50 years since his passing, and 80 since the end of the Spanish Civil War. With help from my friend Lara López of Spanish National Radio, I put together an ensemble of Spanish and Latin American musicians. We took a liberal approach to the original scores, adding new elements under the direction of jazz pianist Federico Lechner and the evocative voice of folk singer Eliseo Parra. The concert was a huge success. But I was nostalgic for a more pared-down interpretation, closer to how my dad would play his songs at home.

In 2022 this project entered its next phase when I was introduced (again, by Lara López) to an extraordinary young musician from Galicia, Spain, called Samuel Diz, a virtuoso classically-trained guitarist deeply involved in a growing movement to recover music by Spaniards who, like my father, were exiled after the Civil War. We are now working together with a tenor from Argentina called Jonatan Alvarado, who has the voice of an angel. He too is classically-trained, specialising in medieval and renaissance music, giving him a very pure vocal tone. He is also a fine tango and *milonga* singer, and a multilinguist, like my dad. Together, we have taken a more faithful approach to compiling a *Cancionero de Gustavo Durán* (Gustavo Durán Songbook). It's been a remarkable learning experience for me, as we delve into my father's complex poly-faceted world, documenting his musical sources as best we can. Many questions are left unanswered. How I wish I could talk to my dad now! I realise in hindsight that this music was his way of communicating about his exile from Spain, the atrocities of the Civil War, lost and gained loves, and more.

Samuel, who plays a replica of [Spanish poet] Federico García Lorca's guitar, is adapting my dad's piano scores – not an easy task, as it involves transposing keys and compressing the wide range of the piano to the guitar's fewer octaves. Jonatan brings his knowledge of early Spanish music and Latin American folksong, while my role is to add details of tempo, timbre and expression, remembered from joining in with the songs at home all those years ago. We have now built a repertoire of around 15 pieces for the *Cancionero de Gustavo Durán*, and are working on more.

Recently, on November 19, in Cadiz, at the Festival of Spanish Music Manuel de Falla, Samuel and Jonatan presented a selection of my father's compositions dated 1925-1963. This was the first-ever performance of this music in public at a festival. It received a standing ovation from a packed hall. On a day of dazzling sunshine in the Casa de Iberoamérica, looking out at the Atlantic, I felt immensely proud of my father, Gustavo Durán. ◆

***As told by Lucy Durán***

Courtesy of Lucy Durán

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# Eliza Carthy's NEWS OF THE WHIRL

Eliza surveys the year just passed, looking at the artists from England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland who have carried on folk traditions, and a few that haven't...

Tonight finds me sitting in a Milton Keynes dressing room, reflecting on the British and Irish folk scenes and our recovery from the pandemic.

This venue, The Stables in Wavendon, is a staple of any mid-sized tour. Everyone comes here; touring jazz outfits sitting neatly in the programme with the extent of everything the folk scene has to offer. As not all our favourite venues of this size made it through the crisis, it is good to be back, and to see them doing well, 'getting back to normal,' whatever that is!

I've turned to the resource that seems to have, hopefully temporarily, replaced the annual BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards. The Official Folk Charts, in conjunction with Matthew Bannister and the English Folk Expo at Manchester Folk Festival, gives a pretty good picture of 'folk' in 2023. I'm happy to say the scene has some colour in its cheeks as we head towards Christmas.

At the beginning of the year, everyone was praising *False Lankum*, an album rightly scooping up every award going. The profound, partly politically-led sea change being felt across the Irish scene is manifesting beautifully, with 'newer', 'younger' voices like Daoirí Farrell and Lisa O'Neill now firmly established and flourishing alongside giants of the revival like Finbar Furey and master fiddler Martin Hayes. And let's not forget the roaring, incendiary delight that is The Mary Wallopers and their *Irish Rock'n'Roll*.

Scotland is similarly healthy with both tradition and innovation. Duncan Chisholm, of Wolfstone and Blazin' Fiddles fame, released his seventh studio album, *Black Cuillin*, to a nomination at the Scots Trad Music Awards 2023 and the conferring of an honorary Doctorate at the University of the Highlands and Islands for his contribution to Scots culture. Long-time Eddi Reader collaborator Boo Hewerdine also has new music out, as do younger, well-established bands Rura and Skerryvore.

Tearaway lads' band Dallahan have been touring Europe, releasing incredibly skilful, explosive and soulful music. Scotland is of course the home of Lau, the pioneering polymaths whose festival, Lau-Land, this year once again celebrated the experimental, strange and unusual corners of independent arts creation. The band's Martin Green has also continued his foray into theatre and brass music.

**I'm happy to report that the old buggers among English [trad] remain creative and exciting**

I was lucky enough to see Welsh group Calan at Gower Folk Festival this year, and highly recommend their dense rhythmic harmonies. Wales has its own Folk Awards and this year's nominations were stuffed with talent. Other recommendations include soloist Cerys Hafana, Trials of Cato and Georgia Ruth.

So to England! The old guard are sitting next to plenty of new talent, sub-scenes and ideas. And I'm happy to report that the old buggers among the English remain creative and exciting. Shirley Collins shows no signs of abating, having returned from her decades-long hiatus. Her album *Archangel Hill* is another treasure of interesting choices. Martin Simpson has two projects on the go this year – one with Thomm Jutz and one folk-rocking out with The Magpie Arc.

Collaborations are a feature, too. Multi-artist tributes to Bert Jansch, the songs of Nick Drake in *The Endless Coloured Ways* compilation, and *The Sea Song Sessions*, featuring Jon Boden, Seth Lakeman, Ben Nicholls and Emily Portman. On a boat, no less! Hack-Poets Guild features my cousin Marry Waterson with Lisa Knapp and Nathaniel Mann on a set of original songs suffused with poetic imagery and drowsy melodies. Northumbrian piper/fiddler Kathryn Tickell and her band The Darkening (featuring one of my favourite Scottish composers/fiddlers/singers, Kate Young) are recording, as are revival stars Kate Rusby and Seth Lakeman.

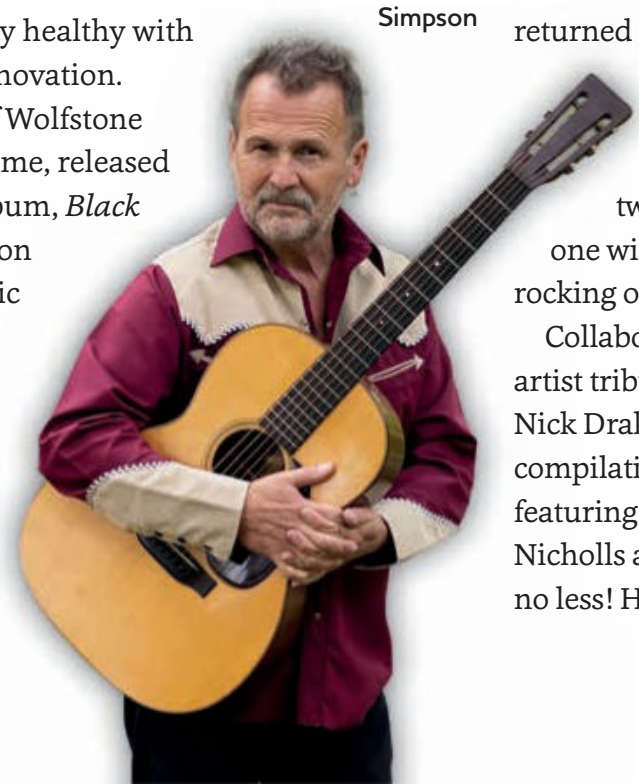
New guard then? There's a lot of excited talk (much coming from my Dad, who saw them live) about Goblin Band, formed from the staff of London's Hobgoblin Music and bringing punk energy to old stories. They spend time at the MOTH club in Hackney, which can host a celebration of Folkways Records one night, Martin Simpson another, and a Madonnathon at the weekend... the punks are out in force in fact, bands like Skinny Lister and their *Shanty Punk* making their mark.

Of course, there's also Angeline Morrison. I've said it before, and I did produce *The Sorrow Songs*, but Angeline's presence on the folk scene is a wonder. Listen out for her on Jim Moray's *Beflean*.

Finally, to the inclusion in the Folk Charts of music that doesn't necessarily relate to traditions. In the past I felt the term 'indie' was good enough for them and traditions needed to be guarded. These days, I feel the crossover potentials are so tasty, that I just don't want to be so churlish any more. So welcome guitar maestro Ben Walker with *Banish Air from Air*, welcome Bernard Butler & Jessie Buckley, Gaz Brookfield, the Levellers and the genius Richard Dawson.

At the end of this year, the prospects are looking good. Artists are finding ways to create and thrive, and yes we are doing it by racking our brains for projects that might poke their heads above the parapet of noise that the music world can be, but I believe that great things are coming from that. Next year is going to be very interesting indeed.

But do bring the BBC Folk Awards back! Go on... ◆



Martin Simpson

Elly Lucas

SONGLINES
ESSENTIAL
10

# NEW PORTUGUESE ALBUMS

In the past five years, Portuguese music has galvanised, reimagining *fado*, classical and traditional music in startling new ways. ***Gonçalo Frota*** picks his highlights

## 01. Sopa de Pedra
*Do Claro ao Breu*
(Lovers & Lollypops, 2022)

Rooted in the oral singing traditions of Portugal's central and northern regions, Sope de Pedra explore a wide array of emotional musical landscapes, from the luminous to the obscure, paying tribute to poet Eugénio de Andrade, among others. Never shying away from experimental liberties (imagine Björk born in Portugal's inland), they boldly recreate traditional communal singing on their own terms.

## 02. Gisela João
*Aurora*
(Sons Em Trânsito / Universal Music, 2021)

Gisela João, a fan of house and techno, always said she would take electronic music into *fado*, raising much scepticism in the process. When she finally got there, with *Aurora*, every hint of the plan spun out with such subtlety and sobriety it almost went unnoticed. Jazz pianist Justin Stanton (from Snarky Puppy) was the perfect partner for a set of gorgeous songs, piano and Portuguese guitar shouldering her voice in brilliant tracks such as the Lhasa de Sela-like 'Já Não Choro por Ti', 'Canção do Coração' and 'Louca'.

## 03. Lina & Raül Refree
*Lina_Raül Refree*
(Glitterbeat Records, 2020)

After emerging as a traditional *fadista*, Lina surprisingly teamed up with Spanish musician/producer Raül Refree, a key figure in Rosalía and Sílvia Pérez Cruz' debuts. This time, Refree ditched the guitar for synth and piano to create a musical tapestry beneath Lina's intense renditions of (almost entirely) tunes from Amália's repertoire. Suddenly these are *fados* of today.

## 04. Amélia Muge
*Amélias*
(Uguru, 2022)

Influenced by José Afonso and José Mário Branco, Muge creates music in which traditional rhythms and melodies meet a vocal restlessness. *Amélias* is a wide portrait of her various qualities – she is a respected songwriter, frequently summoned by *fadistas*, and having been born in Mozambique, she is a reference for the style's origins. A miraculous contemporary take on what tradition, as a living entity, can mean today.

## 05. Dead Combo
*Odeon Hotel*
(Sony Music, 2018)

In tribute to Portuguese guitar great Carlos Paredes, Pedro Gonçalves and Tó Trips created their duo, one of the most original offerings of Portuguese music in these last years. If *fado* had been created on electric guitar in a jazz club it would have sounded like this. Dead Combo's final album (Gonçalves died in 2021), *Odeon Hotel* is a fine summary of their essence – one that always portrayed Lisbon's multiculturality and played with the transformation of the city's soundscape in mind, nodding to Brazilian and Cape-Verdean sounds.

## 06. Retimbrar
*Levantar do Chão*
(Revolução d'Alegria, 2022)

When percussionists António Serginho and Pancho founded Retimbrar, their aim was to collect, reclaim and utilise as many traditional Portuguese instruments as possible. Little by little they became a formidable group using their research and instrumentation to create truly original songs. *Levantar do Chão*, which includes more than 80 collaborators, is as simple and charming as it gets.

## 07. Filho da Mãe
*Água-Má*
(Lovers & Lollypops, 2018)

If the legacy of Carlos Paredes is in good hands with Ricardo Rocha, it also lives on through classical guitar performers like Filho da Mãe. His songs contain no shortage of fingerpicking drawn from the Paredes school, but he also winks towards John Fahey and Paco de Lucía. Mostly his style draws from creating a distance between his rock background and a newfound expression arriving from his intimate search for a language that connects him to the instrument.

## 08. Carminho
*Portuguesa*
(Warner Music, 2023)

With each album, Carminho has perfected a personal vision of what *fado* can mean. She never strays far from tradition, though she never compromises her artistic freedom, welcoming pedal steel, electric guitar and synths to a music these instruments are not used to. With tracks like 'As Fontes (Fado Sophia)', 'O Quarto (Fado Pagem)' and 'Praias Desertas', she connects past and present, finding the perfect setting for her voice to aim at a liberated, affirmative womanhood.

## 09. Júlio Resende
*Fado Jazz*
(Sony Music, 2020)

When Resende first came into prominence as a jazz pianist, he was flirting with songs from Radiohead, John Mayer, Nirvana and The Beach Boys (some with singer Elisa Rodrigues), but he also started a dialogue with *fado*. Soon enough, Resende expanded on that concept, digging further into Portuguese musical history, addressing Amália Rodrigues' repertoire in particular. Here, he takes that knowledge and passion into a set of tunes with a jazz ensemble.

## 10. Diabo na Cruz
*Lebre*
(Sony Music, 2018)

In theory, playing traditional-inspired tracks in The Strokes' style seems an odd proposition. But Diabo na Cruz pulled if off astonishingly and built an extraordinary discography that looks deep into Portuguese popular music as a source for their vocal and percussive arsenal. They are indebted to rock, but songs like 'Roque da Casa', 'Malhão 3.0' and 'Terra Natal' have a place in any Portuguese summer party.

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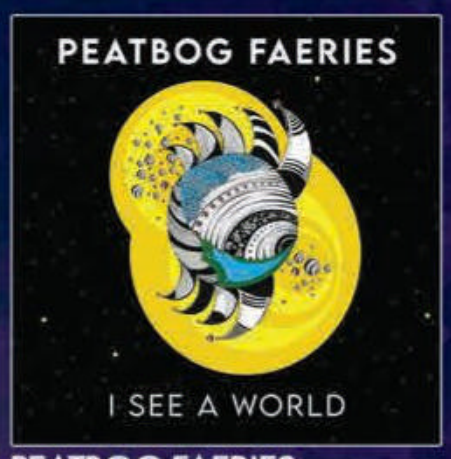
# BEST OF THE YEAR 2023

KATE RUSBY
*LIGHT YEARS*
PURE RECORDS

CINDER WELL
*CADENCE*
FREE DIRT RECORDS

DAMIR IMAMOVIC
*THE WORLD AND ALL THAT IT HOLDS*
SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS

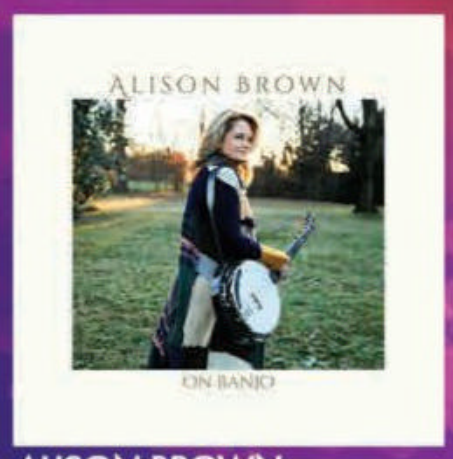
DOM FLEMONS
*TRAVELING WILDFIRE*
SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS




PEATBOG FAERIES
*I SEE A WORLD*
PEATBOG RECORDS

LE VENT DU NORD
*LES VOIX DU VENT*
LA COMPAGNIE DU NORD

KELLY HUNT
*OZARK SYMPHONY*
COMPASS RECORDS




ALISON BROWN
*ON BANJO*
COMPASS RECORDS

SANDY KELLY
*LEAVING IT ALL BEHIND*
CRASHED RECORDS

THE LANGAN BAND
*PLIGHT O' SHEEP*
LANGAN BAND RECORDS

CATRIN FINCH &
AOIFE NÍ BHRIAIN
*DOUBLE YOU*
BENDIGEDIG

MOKOOMBA
*TUSONA: TRACINGS IN THE SAND*
OUT HERE

ALTIN GÜN
*AŞK*
GLITTERBEAT

BRÌGHDE CHAIMBEUL
*CARRY THEM WITH US*
GLITTERBEAT

EKITI SOUND
*DRUM MONEY*
CRAMMED DISCS

NKONO TELES
*LOVE VIBRATION*
SOUNDWAY

# NOR WAY

## CELTIC CONNECTIONS GLASGOW

**Wed 24 Jan**

### ALEXANDER AGA RØYNSTRAND

**Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, Strathclyde Suite 8:00pm**

Solo Hardanger fiddler extraordinaire.

**Thu 25 Jan**

### ERLEND VIKEN TRIO

**Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, New Auditorium 7:30pm**

Blends genres with Norwegian trad, combining electric guitar, hardanger fiddle, and double bass for a unique sound.

**Fri 26 Jan**

### ÆVESTADEN

**The Mackintosh Church 7:30pm**

Unique soundscapes create an open and atmospheric world.

### GANGAR

**Old Fruitmarket 8:00pm**

Gangar brings the folk-rock party to Glasgow.

**Sat 27 Jan**

### JULIE ALAPNES

**Saint Luke's 7:30pm**

Blending rock's intensity with folk's richness, Julie excels as both a fiddler and a singer.

### GABBA

**CCA 8:15pm**

Fuse Sami yoik with blues, soul, folk, and Western influences for a lively tundra-blues mix.

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MUSIC NORWAY FOLK ORG Celtic Connections ShoWCAse ScOtLaND